

LITERACY CONNECTION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF FOURTH GRADE READING  
TEACHERS IN THE DOUGHERTY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM FOR  
STRUGGLING READERS

By

Jamaul Rashard Kennedy

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Columbus State University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

in Curriculum and Leadership

Columbus State University

Columbus, GA

February 2018

©Copyright 2018 by Jamaul Rashard Kennedy

All rights reserved

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and my late grandmothers, Alice and Ella Kennedy. Your indescribable beliefs in my abilities has given me an opportunity to be stronger, wiser, smarter and more dedicated than I could have ever imagined.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation would have not been possible without the love and support from my family and friends. Jennifer (mom), your encouragement and belief in me is overwhelming. It is amazing how far you are willing to push when someone believes in you. Quintavious, your words of wisdom and constant motivation are second to none and priceless. Dr. Andrew Lovett, Dr. Sheila Thomas, Dr. Shawn Davidson, and Dr. Sheryl Holmes, your experience with this doctoral journey made the knowledge that you provided that much more meaningful. To my family, thank you for always supporting me and understanding the missed gatherings, phone calls returned days later, and even listening to my gripes about giving up. To Cheryl Foster, my first grade teacher, and Darren Johnson, my high school band director, thank you for helping me to believe that I would be a great educator one day. Again, it is incredible how a few encouraging words can leverage one to the successful completion of journey.

This endeavor could have not been possible without my dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Richardson, Dr. Pamela Lemoine, and Dr. Marguerite Yates. I am truly indebted and have greatly benefited from my dissertation chair, Dr. Michael Richardson. Thank you for never giving up on me, listening when I could not even make sense of my own thoughts, providing strength when I could not envision any in sight, and for reminding me that anything is possible. Dr. Pamela Lemoine, thank you for your tough love and constructive feedback that prepared me for the obstacles ahead. Dr. Margeurite Yates, thank you for being a breath of fresh air and for your warming spirit for helping

others succeed. I appreciate you all and thank you for your encouragement and immeasurable belief that this was an attainable achievement for me.

## VITA

Jamaul R. Kennedy, Ed.S. MPA, BA  
500 Pinson Road Apt. B 2  
Albany, Georgia 31705  
Phone: 229-291-2156

- Highly qualified educator with over 7 years of teaching experience.
- Educated in Curriculum and Instruction, Management, Public Policy, and Political Science.
- Highly competent, outcome driven with exceptional organizational skills.
- Extraordinarily responsive, attentive and precise communication with students and peers.
- Experienced in-classroom courses using Blackboard and Canvas. I understand difficulties that the learning environment can bring and have applied workable solutions to these issues.
- Proactive; concerned with student education, understanding and responsive to the balance of student needs with department needs.
- Always engaged in on-going learning development courses to extend and strengthen my professional knowledge
- Capable of providing high-quality instruction and significantly effective experiences for all learners.

### Teaching Experience

Ashford University Online Associate Faculty	2016 - Present
Instructional Connections, Online Online Academic Coach	2015 - Present
Albany State University- Department of History & Political Science Adjunct Instructor	2014 - Present
My Education Express, Inc. Online Tutor	2014 -Present
Dougherty County School System Fifth Grade English Language Arts	2017-Present
Dougherty County School System Fourth Grade Reading Educator Magnet School	2015-Present

### Education Experience

Ed.D. Curriculum & Instruction Columbus State University	2018
Ed.S. Curriculum & Instruction-Management Administration Nova Southeastern University	2013
MPA General Administration Albany State University	2012
BA Political Science Albany State University	2010

### Memberships and Affiliations

Pi Sigma Alpha, The National Political Science Honor Society	2008 – Present
American Society for Public Administration	2010 – Present
Pi Alpha Alpha, National Honor Society for Students of Public Admin	2010 – Present
Golden Key International Honor Society	2008 – Present

### Awards and Honors

Dean's List	Spring 2010
Who's Who Among American High School Students	Spring 2006

## ABSTRACT

Societal expectations center upon the belief that children in grade four should be competent in terms of literacy skills and having acquired the necessary foundational skills to be successful in grade four. Instructional practices, reading programs and resources are linked to reading achievement and literacy acquisition of students. In Southwest Georgia, teachers' instructional practices from twelve schools in urban Dougherty County were examined. The researcher examined the instructional practices of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System to determine the perceived impact on reading achievement and literacy acquisition of struggling fourth grade readers. The fourth grade reading teachers served as the independent variable while the instructional practices served as the dependent variable. The two groups of teachers were analyzed during this study included 1) a group of teachers who possessed 10 or less years teaching grade four reading. 2) a group of teachers who possessed more than 10 years teaching grade four. The study analyzed the mean scores of the teachers in with 10 or less and other teachers who possessed 10 or more and the entire tested population.

For research question 1, the results indicated that those with 11 or more years of experience leveraged a wider range of strategies than did those with 10 or fewer years of experience, although both groups tended to use a fairly wide variety of instructional strategies. Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, the strategies that were commonly used by the participants include introducing new vocabulary words before they are presented in the text; modeling fluency; grouping students based on ability and pairing students, including cooperative groups; teaching



students reading strategies; phonetics instruction (sounding out); read alouds; and differentiated instruction. In addition to these common instructional strategies, teachers also tended to use graphic organizers, leveled readers, and technology based programs.

For research question 2, based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, participants believe that the strategies they are using (especially differentiated instruction, grouping and modeling) and the materials that they are leveraging (e.g. graphic organizers, leveled readers, technology based programs) are effective at impacting the reading achievement of struggling readers because they allow for students to receive incremental modeling, incremental and faster feedback, incremental one-on-one instruction, and they help students to monitor their own learning as well as think critically. The consequences of these impacts include an increase in student engagement, an increase in student motivation, and ultimately incremental growth as defined by increased reading fluency and comprehension. Some potential obstacles to achieving these goals include having to meet specific “one size fits all” standards on tests, which causes teachers to have to speed up the pace of instruction and thus not having enough instructional time.

A major implication for educators was the determination that instructional practices of educators support and impact the reading and literacy development of struggling readers. Additionally, educators who possessed 10 or more years reasoned that word level recognition and phonics was a key determinant in terms of success of struggling readers. Word level instruction in grade 4 implies that explicit instruction in grades K-2 is needed prior to students entering grade 4. Additionally, professional development is needed for in-service teachers to equip them with strategies and

instructional practices specific to the needs of struggling readers to address the deficits.

Future research should focus on longitudinal implications for this population utilizing a larger sample size, would provide additional implications for educators.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
VITA .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xv
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .....	1
Models of Reading .....	2
Teacher’s Perceptions .....	3
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Research Questions .....	5
Conceptual Framework .....	6
Importance of the Study .....	6
Procedures .....	7
Limitations/Delimitations .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	8
Theoretical Framework .....	11
Summary .....	13
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	14
Introduction .....	14
Perceptions of Educators .....	15
Theoretical perspectives .....	15
Aesthetic Reading Theory .....	16
Historical Perspective. ....	16
Early Childhood Years .....	18
The Reading Brain .....	19
Reading Comprehension .....	21
Reading Instruction .....	23
Reading Practices .....	24

Reading Achievement.....	30
Reading Readiness.....	31
Empirical Research.....	35
Literacy Acquisition.....	38
Instructional Practices.....	42
Small Group Reading Instruction .....	43
Reading Programs/ Core Curriculum/Common Core Standards.....	44
Concept and Study Analysis .....	47
Summary .....	54
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	56
Introduction.....	56
Research Questions.....	56
Research Design.....	56
Population .....	58
Participants.....	59
Sample.....	60
Instrumentation .....	60
Validation.....	61
Data Collection .....	61
Data Analysis .....	62
Qualitative Data Analysis .....	63
Reporting the Data .....	64
Reliability.....	64
Summary .....	66
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	68
Research Questions.....	68
Research Design.....	68
Respondents .....	69
Findings - Descriptive Data .....	69
Data Analysis Procedures .....	70
Data Analysis .....	71

Results.....	77
Quantitative Trends.....	77
Qualitative Trends.....	80
Research Question 1 .....	84
Research Question 2 .....	85
Summary .....	86
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ....	88
Summary .....	88
REFERENCES .....	104
APPENDICES .....	116
Appendix A: Request For Permission To Use Survey Instrument .....	117
Appendix B: Deford Theoretical Orientation To Reading Profile.....	118
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	120
Appendix D: Irb Permission .....	121
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form – Survey .....	122
Appendix F: Informed Consent Form – Interviews.....	124
Appendix G: District Request for Research Process .....	126
Appendix H: School Request for Research Process .....	127
Appendix I: Participant Request for Research Processes .....	128
Appendix J: Email Scripts for Participants.....	130
Appendix K: Email Script for Principals.....	131
Appendix L: Email Script for Superintendent .....	132
Appendix M: Letter of Cooperation From District.....	133

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Studies Related to Instructional Practices & Literacy Acquisition.....	48
Table 2. Studies Related to Reading Readiness.....	51
Table 3. Studies Related to Reading Programs.....	54
Table 4. Research Confirmation Table .....	58
Table 5. Research Confirmation Table - Item Analysis .....	66
Table 6. Participant Teaching Experience .....	70
Table 7. Survey Descriptive Results.....	72
Table 8. Interview Transcript Descriptive Summary.....	74
Table 9. Linkage of Interview Questions with Research Questions.....	76
Table 10. Survey Comparison by Teaching Experience.....	78
Table 11. Thematic Analysis by Interview Question.....	81
Table 12. Meta-Themes based on Participant Interviews.....	83
Table 13. Relationships among Research.....	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework .....	12
Figure 2: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.....	12
Figure 3: Instructional Practices .....	55
Figure 4: Survey ratings by teaching experience.....	80

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

There are few people that would question the fact that reading is one of the most important achievements of a child's early childhood educational experience. The reading pendulum has shifted back and forth as it relates to reading instruction since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century there have been numerous debates as to the "best" way to teach children to read.

Researchers indicates that struggling readers will have difficulty catching up with proficient readers (Drummond, 2005). Struggling readers may be at a disadvantage as they grow older and even into adulthood, which diminishes the hopes of a child who wishes to have a productive life. Hence, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) both have expressed the need for early grade teachers to be knowledgeable regarding literacy instruction and understand their roles in promoting reading for students. There are few studies that have been conducted at the study sites, from the perspectives of teachers in terms of instructional practices used with readers using a mixed design. This perspective is necessary to improve instruction for struggling fourth grade readers.

Reading skills substantially influence a student's ability to learn across subject areas. Unfortunately, estimates within the United States suggest that nearly 90 percent of fourth grade students with disabilities do not have proficient reading skills (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2000) Children's academic self-belief can be associated with reading achievement. Research has also consistently demonstrated the importance of



early literacy instruction, as these skills are the developmental precursors of conventional reading (Visay & Gischlar, 2013). Additionally, reading readiness is important as children matriculate through the early grades. There are several ways of improving reading readiness in children; help children understand the importance of reading, make it fun, and read frequently to children (Visay & Gischlar, 2013). With reading being of importance, there are other components such as curriculum, classroom experiences, and transitions from grade to grade that influence the way students acquire the necessary literacy skills.

Approximately 50% percent of students who attend public elementary schools in grades K-5 have difficulty reading at the fundamental levels (Salinger, 2003). Research indicates that almost 40% of students in fourth grade fall below the national average on standardized reading assessments (Salinger, 2003). In turn, there is a substantial amount of research that exists on the improvement of reading in relation to the instructional practices of teachers (Allington, 2006; Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007; Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004; Gambrell, Malloy & Mazzoni, 2007).

### Models of Reading

Furthermore, three classes of models have been developed to describe the way in which readers draw meaning from texts: bottom-up, top-down and interactive approaches (Gunning, 2008). The bottom-up model of reading presumes that print is translated to meaning by the print itself. The process is basically intended to make the idea of learning to read easier by dividing more complex tasks into components of decoding graphic symbols into sounds. First, the reader must identify the overall features of the letters and

then combine letters to recognize spelling patterns. Then, spelling patterns are linked to the processing of texts (Gunning, 2008).

Top-down approach to reading deals with the process of translating print to meaning in a natural sense as learning is based on the reader's prior knowledge or skill set. This approach to learning to read begins by making guesses towards the meanings of words. Readers are expected to decode graphic symbols into sounds to check to see if their predictions in terms of the meaning are correct (Gunning, 2008).

The interactive model approach to reading explains the overarching process of translating print to meaning as well. This process involves the use of the two aforementioned approaches; making use of both prior knowledge and print does not separate or slow down the process. The process begins by making predictions about meaning or decoding symbols as well. The reader then guesses based upon the interactions.

#### Teacher's Perceptions

Teachers have different beliefs about the reading process and how children acquire literacy skills tend to have an impact on their choice of instructional methods and materials. Research reveals that teacher's beliefs are often so strong upheld that it causes them to bring resistance to change in curriculum methods, resist advice and support from others, and also influence the degree to which teachers are willing or not willing to make adjustments in their approaches to teaching students (Knight & Redden, 1997).

Now, with the state led efforts of the National Common Core Curriculum Standards movement for English/Language Arts, education has witnessed a shift in the paradigm with the reenergizing of the importance of reading across the curriculum

(McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Thirty-seven states, territories, and the District of Columbia have adopted these standards. With the implementation of Common Core Standards, came the need for more standard aligned core reading programs.

A continuing and fast occurring public school demographic shift has significantly added stress to classrooms using traditional pedagogy (Meidl, 2013). Standards and objectives from the national, state, and local district levels are transitioned into curricula, which is known as core reading programs. Core reading programs have been around for decades as a form of standard curriculum. In the 1980's they were known as basal readers. Much research has been done on the effectiveness of core reading programs to facilitate the process of teaching children how to read. Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), funding has been provided at the national level to support the use of core reading program because of their completeness and alignment to state standards and assessments (Meidl, 2013).

#### Statement of the Problem

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that many children have difficulty achieving success in reading. Teachers' perceptions of standards and the support provided for instructional practices influence their willingness and ability to change methods of curriculum and instruction, which, in turn, affect the day-to-day implementation of literacy instruction.

College and Career Readiness Performance Indices (CCRPI), a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders to promote college and career readiness, has been greatly affected by the performance of students in the area of ELA in grades 3 through five. Since the inception

of the NCLB ACT (2002), teachers, administrators, and school districts have been concerned with identifying the best practices to close the academic gap between struggling readers and non-struggling readers (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Strickland et al., 2002; Thompkins, 2003).

The problem is the need to find out why the fourth grade students within the schools participating in the district are seeing an increase in the number of struggling readers. Fourth grade reading teachers and administrators are concerned with identifying practices to close the academic achievement gap between struggling and non-struggling readers.

On the other hand, the reality of teachers' instructional practices affect the day to day implementation of literacy instruction, which makes it impossible to address each and every individualized learners' needs in a classroom of learners. Literacy has to be a supplement to the regular classroom instruction.

#### Research Questions

The following research question(s) are designed to assess the various aforementioned issues noted:

1. What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?
2. How does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the reading achievement of struggling readers?

## Conceptual Framework

The central concepts in this study are broken down into categories: Core Curriculum and students experiences in terms of academic growth in terms of literacy. There are theories in places, such as Zone of Proximal Development overtime that helps to determine students' progression up to grade 4. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides an important understanding of learning (Golding & Wass, 2014).

## Importance of the Study

As a teacher of reading, it is important to examine instructional practices and programs that have a direct effect on the reading achievement of struggling readers. Research is necessary for analyzing the extent to which core curriculum practices and classroom experiences affect the literacy acquisition of students. The results will provide an examination of quality instructional practices in place for struggling readers. The results also will help to show the relationship between belief and actions among teachers and how practices are influential to the development of literacy skills for struggling readers.

The results of this study can add to an ever changing and growing body of knowledge about the overall relationships between core curriculum, reading performance and instructional practices. The results will also provide classroom teachers and school administrators with current information about teacher preferences for specific models of early literacy and help determine how to construct alternate approaches to gauge struggling readers prior to grade four and create a plan of action. The results will also help administrators become aware of the perceived instructional practices of teachers.

Overall, this data can also be used to inform policy and curricular decisions for the standards regarding reading/literacy instruction in efforts to ensure that they remain consistent with current educational practices and trends.

Overall, the importance of the study is to examine the instructional practices of reading teachers and how the practices affect the reading achievement and literacy acquisition of struggling readers in grade four. The results will also help inform administrators and teachers on how or if instruction is being guided in direct alignment with state standard expectations.

### Procedures

The research methodology used in this study is categorized as descriptive mixed methods research. This design is a single group, qualitative phenomenological study, with a purposeful selection of subjects. The design was selected to obtain self-reported data from participants to examine the instructional strategies of fourth grade teachers of reading in Dougherty County.

The researcher surveyed teachers to analyze their use of instructional strategies in their fourth grade classrooms. Survey questions were close ended questions, using a 4-point likert scale, and designed to determine teachers' use of specific instructional reading strategies in fourth grade classrooms. After the surveys were done, which helped gauge the opinions of teachers in terms of their instructional strategies and student performance, the researcher selected participants to interview. The study is mixed methods in nature, mainly due to the fact that this is the best possible method to answer the research questions and gain the overall descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants.

### Limitations/Delimitations

One of the delimitations is that the teachers are able to determine their use of strategies, which will help with the study and carrying out of research to answer the researcher's questions. This allows for some generalization to take place among the teachers.

Based on the study and the way teachers are departmentalized in this school, one limitation included the population size. This study is limited to only teachers who are currently teachers of reading in grade four in Dougherty County, although there have been other teachers who may have the same experiences, who are now teaching other content areas or may be serving in a different county.

Another limitation of includes the altering of state curriculum and assessments for reading over the last decade. Curriculum changes to reading course content results in gaps in student knowledge as well as teacher knowledge when key components are changed or moved to different grade levels without compensating for the current level students. The lack of targeted assistance for teacher preparation to implement Common Core Standards, which impact assessment results is a limitation of this study as well.

### Definition of Terms

Effective Schools- This term is used in this study to refer to school programs that affect the organization of the school in all content areas. These schools have clearly defined objects and literacy components to improve student achievement.

Program Components- Research on effective schools has consistently identified program components that are evident in schools that perform at high levels. The following components are mentioned in this study: beliefs, classroom instruction,

supplementary instruction, professional development, home/school partnerships, and literacy leadership. The words components, characteristics and factors are used within the literature review.

Beliefs- Researchers stated that it is essential to establish common beliefs about the acquisition of literacy within the school when providing literacy instruction. Literacy instruction demands a conceptive effort that involves all individuals in the school community working toward a shared vision. Common beliefs, understanding, and purpose about the acquisition of literacy must be articulated and become a “shared” ordeal within the educational community in order for all students involved to achieve success. All the school’s faculty and staff must be committed to the belief that each person serves the purpose of making a difference in the lives of students.

Classroom Literacy Program- The overarching goal of making meaning and connections was the overall goal of literacy acquisition. Literacy involved the process of reading and writing and require careful instructional planning to help ensure that all students received the appropriate instruction. It was imperative that classroom instruction is individualized based on student needs. Lastly, one of the most important factors of literacy effectiveness was teachers’ full understanding of literacy theories.

Supplemental Instruction- Learning difficulties made learning a challenge for students and teaching a more creative process for teachers. Supplemental literacy instruction must be well coordinated, individualized for specific needs of each student, and provided using a series of instructional strategies. Services provided for students who need supplemental help must be flexible in the design to be able to make the necessary changes when needed.



Professional Development- Researchers indicates that teachers benefited from effective professional development. Professional Development must encompass the following:

- Provide for continuous improvement;
- Require strong leadership in order to obtain necessary on-going support and to motivate all individuals involved to ensure continuous improvement;
- Be aligned with the school districts and/or school's strategic goals
- Allocation of time must be provided during the work day on a regular basis for teachers to learn together continuously;
- Be an innovator of constant change in educational practices and norms;

Home/School Partnership- Communication between home and school is a two-way conversation that must take place to ensure student success. This partnership provides parents with the opportunity to have a variety of options to participate in their children's educational career. The most effective schools provide avenues for parents to travel along the journey of their child's educational path and be provided with the necessary support for student success in all areas. All community stakeholders and parents influence the educational community and should be encourage to take part in volunteer opportunities in schools.

Literacy Leadership (Coach) - Literacy coaches assist with providing teachers with the necessary support, direction, and assistance to help with development. The literacy coach coordinates data collection and provides professional development for teachers to assist them with possessing a high level of knowledge of literacy instruction.

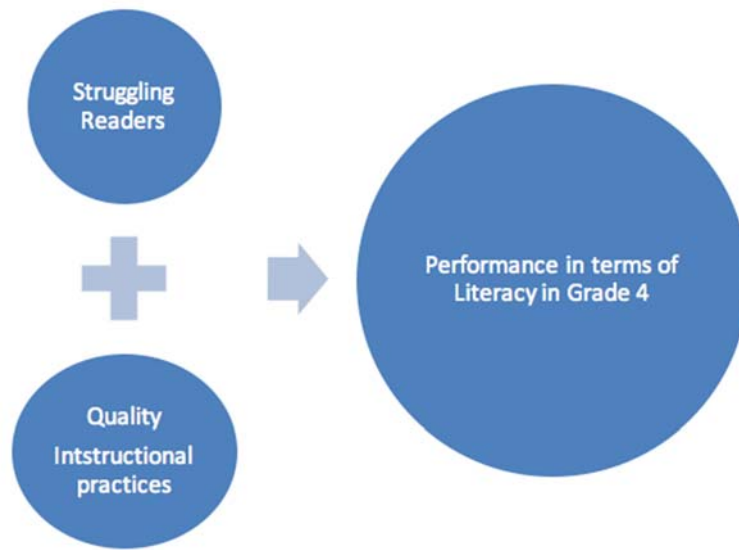
Fluency- Fluency is defined or characterized by speed, accuracy, and expression.

Guided Reading- A method of teaching reading to small groups utilizing books chosen by the teacher in order to teach specific skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

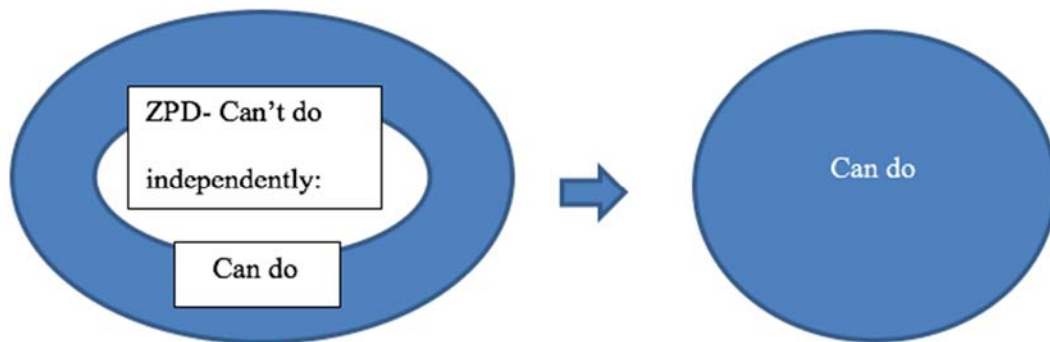
Interactive activities- Learning activities that contains strategies that are aspects of the interactive literacy approach, which includes interactive reading skills activities and group/individualized teacher-student instruction and partnered activities.

#### Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development is a powerful tool for understanding teaching and it also is a powerful tool for supporting learning across contents, particularly reading. Teaching within a child's ZPD allows for teachers to assign tasks with the students' independent ability range, but not beyond their ability with assistance (Golding & Wass, 2014). This also allows for learning the scaffolded so that students can eventually isolate and solve the educative challenges and learn to complete tasks independently (Golding & Wass, 2014). Using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, along with scaffolding, allows for students to do harder tasks and will lead to the greatest learning gains (Golding & Wass, 2014).



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*



*Figure 2: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development*

## Summary

In this chapter, the researcher provided the problem at hand, the goal of the research, and the research questions that guided this research. The purpose of this chapter was to inform the reader of the problem, which centers upon teachers' perceptions and use of instructional strategies to help struggling readers in fourth grade classrooms. The significance of this study lies upon the fact that it will help teachers to have an idea of how teaching practices affect the overall performance of students. In doing so, the researcher proposes to assist teachers in their day-to-day practices and help them in becoming aware of the different components of core curriculum that will impact the literacy acquisition of students.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Since the early 1900s, many teachers have used reading groups to provide instruction to students with various levels of reading achievement (Worthy et. al., 2015). Literacy and reading are two of the most important skills that one will ever acquire. One of the greatest challenges faced by educators is ensuring that students are reading at the appropriate grade level and possess the necessary literacy skills to function in the world around them. The future success of children lies in the ability to read fluently and understand what is read.

The purpose of this chapter will provide a review of literature related to the implementation of reading programs, effectiveness of literacy programs, the impact of teachers' beliefs on instructional practices, and the impact of professional development in terms of core reading curriculum can have an effect on literacy instruction. It is essentially important to remain aware of literacy methods and the evolutionary success of those methods over time in efforts to adequately prepare our students for the future. The review focused on an examination of the research available on the topics of factors that can help increase literacy achievement and assist with the implementation of literacy programs in schools. Acquiring the skill of reading fluently is not an easy task and has been under considerable debate about the various theoretical models to help foster success for all students. The search to find the most effective way to provide literacy instruction is still being questioned in the fields and in schools.

## Perceptions of Educators

Educators' perceptions and beliefs also played an important part in the concerns that had been placed on literacy acquisition and what takes place in our classrooms. The beliefs of educators, without a doubt, have some impact on their choices of instructional practices and materials that they utilize. Their beliefs also impact the motivation to consistently fine tune their instructional practices over time as well. Over the years, the instructional tools have changed but reading performance has remained relatively stagnant. Hindman and Wasik (2008) shared a genuine belief that the educators of young children must remain knowledgeable about the current research and educational trends for language and literacy development of students. The levels of instruction in the Head Start centers were of importance to both of the aforementioned authors.

### Theoretical perspectives.

In this study, several theories were relevant. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is centralized due to the fact that literacy development is based upon the individuals' developmental needs. Just as there are many theoretical practices that govern reading as a whole, there are also differences among the approaches to teaching reading. It is necessary to place the three theoretical practices on a continuum, as they are interchangeable.

The linked concepts of scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development are central to the recent progressions in teaching and learning of reading (Wass & Golding, 2014). Scaffolding helps students to solve tasks with assistance, in hopes that they will eventually achieve these tasks on their own. Vygotsky provided us with the theory of ZPD, which allows us to understand and enable learning. The ZPD is part of Vygotsky's

sociocultural theory of learning, which helps to explain how the development of conscious intellectual activity is the result of many cultural influences. The Zone of Proximal Development is an excellent tool for guiding teaching. Teachers should assign tasks that are within the students' ZPD (Wass & Golding, 2014). This will help to stretch beyond their own independent ability, but not beyond their ability with assistance. Teachers should provide assistance to students and scaffold so that students can isolate and solve problems while eventually completing tasks individually.

#### Aesthetic Reading Theory

Moreover, over seven decades ago, Louise Rosenblatt warned teachers that were failing to develop children's ability to respond aesthetically to literature. This theory of aesthetic reading suggests that literary experiences might be made the very core of the kind of educational process that is needed. This theory of Rosenblatt states that students must be able to make meaning of specific texts, the actual experience is at the core of aesthetic reading (Ryan & Dagostino, 2014).

#### Historical Perspective.

Literacy as socially constructed is both a historically based ideology and a collection of context-bound communicative practices. Many educational institutions and their promises were at the center of public debate for much the twentieth century. Now, even in the twenty first century, schooling continues to be viewed as an institutional force for bringing about social change and for providing a sense of academic promises (Collins, 1995; Gee, 1996). It has been often stated that educational communities could not handle the task of teaching basic decoding skills and encoding skills to students and that they could not prepare them for future complex changes. Literacy should be seen as more than

just providing technical knowledge, but also equipping students with the ability to use knowledge with a given prescription for learning. A more historical view of literacy began during the time of early modernity when it was regarded as a virtue.

Much of literature from the last decade speaks of multiple literacies; we have come to appreciate that literacy has many facets (Collins, 1995; Gee, 1996). From this specific perspective, one can see that earlier research mirrored an exclusive Western-centric view, while failing to take into consideration of the diversified cultures that were literate. The act of treating Western social development and uses of literacy as the forefront of literacy itself, it distorted the idea of what it truly meant to be literate. Much of the aforementioned views saw the presence or absence of literacy as an individual attribute that either transforms a person's chances or increases a chance for social and personal failures.

From an ideological perspective, literacy is a set of practices for understanding the world around us; this understanding could be enhanced by the acquiring of basic skills of written and spoken language that forms a continuum. Over time, a major feature of school literacy controversies focused on the debate over whether literacy learning is exclusively school based. For decades there has been a debate over the fact of whether school learning experiences should be the sole attributors of literacy acquisition (Akinlase, 1982). Looking back of the past two hundred years of British history, which mirrors capitalist societies, we understand and are able to assess some of the consequences of present day literacy achievement. Williams notes that:

the argument about the consequences of literacy. . . seems to run somewhat as follows: with the spread of literacy came a new resource of both knowledge and technology that, over time, has systematically affected the nature of existing



cognitive and social structures and led to the gradual deployment into new channels of people's linguistic potential. (Akinnaso, 1982, p. 167)

Later, during the early decades of the last century, and with the overall influence of the now progressive movements in education, that a shift in pedagogy and the practices of schooling took place, thus establishing a school system of opportunities for the promotion of individualized instruction. Today, we witness a society of learners that are best suited for individual learning that leads to recognized talents. In today's society literacy has evolved and we no longer see literacy as a moral force; students are now able to acquire literacy skills that meet their individual needs.

#### Early Childhood Years

Early childhood education is the foundation of a student reading comprehension learning experience. During the rudimentary educational years of a student's learning experience; their neurological processes are still developing. Not like speech, which develops uniformly many languages and cultures and is affiliated with specific brain and motor structures, reading takes place only through the intentional appropriation of existing structures located in the brain (Frey and Fisher 2010). With the diversity of students that make up the student body; there are various cultures and languages that are brought together, which indicates there will be some language, written, and reading comprehension barriers. Research has indicated that not all languages pose a written language component; which will conflict with the student learning experience while he or she is learning how to read for the first time (Frey & Fisher, 2010). With reading being a rule-based system that relies on biological structures that were developed for other reasons; many children are birthed with the right structures; however, the structures do not inherently know how to read (Frey & Fisher, 2010).

## The Reading Brain

The reading brain has to develop to figure out which section is designed to recognize objects into one that recognizes letters and words to construct effective reading comprehension skills (Frey & Fisher, 2010). However; the process of letter and word recognition has to be extended coordinated with the auditory sections of the brain that process the sounds of language and assemble them into meaningful strings (Frey & Fisher, 2010). With educators understanding the essence of the brain structures and how they formulate will assist them with the proper approach when assisting a student who lacks reading comprehension skills. As educators attend annual educational seminars on reading and various methods of instructing reading skills, actively engaging the student in activities that will sharpen their skills will make a tremendous impact of the reading progress of the student. Frey and Fisher (2010) indicates that the connections between the occipital lobe, Broca's area in the left frontal lobe; which poses language processing, and the Wernicke's area in the left temporal lobe; which poses language comprehension has to be trained to perform effectively. If there is any blockage within the Broca and Wernicke area; there will be a negative impact on the individual ability to succeed in reading comprehension (Frey & Fisher 2010). Literature that describes the journey of learning the skill of reading comprehension as the importance of early experiences with the necessary tools to prepare young children for reading instruction (Frey & Fisher, 2010). Developing the brain at an early age affects the long-term of the child/student as he or she began learning how to read, write, and comprehend material. Much learning does begin at home; there for studies have shown that bedtime reading stimulates a large component of a child's development, from language to motor skills to memory (Frey &

Fisher, 2010). With the large number of parents that are not involved in their child's education does not understand the damage they are causing by not assisting the child outside of the classroom to increase their learning development. Research indicates that as young children read more often; the more they will grow to understand the language of books, along with the advantage of increasing their vocabulary, knowledge, grammar, and the awareness of significant sounds inside of words (Frey & Fisher, 2010). Frey and Fisher (2010) believes there is a dynamic connection with a students' reading experiences that are reinforced with activities such as eating, being held, and receiving attention; which is considered a pathway that connects reading with enjoyment in the brain. As a student brain develops from childhood; the physical structure of the brain is forever changing. As prior knowledge is built through direct and indirect experiences and large reading experiences take place, physical changes occur in the brain (Frey & Fisher, 2010). The physical changes are enriched when engaging instruction is taking place; which reinforces direct pathways for knowledge to be acquired, learned, and recalled (Frey & Fisher, 2010). As educators learn more about the brain structures and how they formulate to retain information; Frey and Fisher (2010) indicate that the prefrontal cortex, parietal cortex, and the cerebellum make an impact on the early stages of learning a new skill or procedure. Within these three areas of the brain, it provides the student the advantage to pay attention, execute the correct movements, and perform sequence steps. All the neurological pathways those are associated with the ability for a student to learn how to read, write, and comprehend indicates that students that are provided with effective instruction during their rudimentary educational learning experience can be trained to read with understanding. According to Frey and Fisher (2010), as the

neurological pathways are used in efficiency, the student becomes more fluent and create the time to think to develop new connects.

### Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension involves the ability to recognize words as well as the ability to make meaning of the words read. It is widely believed that for readers to be successful, word recognition must become a fluent and effortless process (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2003; Kuhn & Rasinski, 2007). It is alleged that when reading is not fluent, students need to devote an increased amount of cognitive energy to decoding, in turn, leaving less cognitive ability available for comprehension (Hicks, 2010). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted a study using a representative sample of the nation's 4<sup>th</sup> grade students (Armbruster et al., 2003). The results of this study indicated a positive relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Based on this study, as well as others, the relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension has gained popular interest to educators in recent years, due to its implications in regards to assessment and intervention (Wood, 2006). Has the focus on fluency lessened the importance of comprehension?

Although accurate word recognition is necessary for the comprehension of text, fluency alone may not be sufficient to guarantee text comprehension. This held true for Applegate, Applegate, and Modla (2009) in which case their data indicated that "the freed-up resources that resulted from automaticity and fluency do not necessarily or automatically flow toward comprehension" (p. 519). Their research showed evidence of students placing an over importance on word recognition and fluency without also attempting to develop the higher levels of comprehension. Similarly, Walczyk and

Griffith-Ross (2007) found that some students could read fluently but were not actively engaged with the text. They theorized that students allowed their “minds to wander” due to the ease of the reading (p. 566). In these cases fluency did not have a positive influence on comprehension. So in reality, while oral reading fluency may have a positive relationship to reading comprehension for struggling readers, what is the relationship between these literacy components for readers who are already identified as fluent?

An increasing number of students are constantly left behind academically due to the lack of effective reading comprehension. There may be various variables that contribute to the barriers that middle school students have to obtain effective reading comprehension. The diverse populations of students that are face with the challenge of reading with understanding are found to be labeled with several types of learning disabilities; which can be prevented if there were proper instructional techniques that would address the processes of reading. Understanding the diverse reading processes and relationships that may contribute to reading comprehension can assist those individuals who are providing instruction with the methods that will promote academic growth. Many students are labeled with a learning disability and excel in other academic areas due to a small proportion of a learning process that was not instructed effectively. Reading assessments as well as other academic assessments that are administered annually does not measure the missing parts of students thinking processes. Exploring cultural backgrounds along with several reading techniques that may influence reading comprehension can assist with tackling the reading comprehension problems among middle school students.

## Reading Instruction

According to Shuman (2006), the art of teaching reading has become a demand in modern education due to the lack of effective instruction that is causing an increasing number of students to progress to secondary school without obtaining a working competency in the basic skill of reading. Schools across the nation are implementing more time during the school day that is dedicated to students being a part of reading activities, groups, and one on one instruction to increase assessment scores in reading comprehension. Research suggest that teachers should consider alternate learning methods that will assist more than one content area so that the low performance reading student or the severely disabled reader can have access to the material despite his or her learning barriers (Shuman, 2006). A large number of teachers have been teaching for years and are not equipped to diversify their curriculum to those students who are mainstreamed into the class; which causes students with severe learning disabilities not to receive the same learning opportunity as the other students. When it became a law for exceptional students to receive the same learning experience by being placed in the regular classroom during certain parts of the day; many educators became frustrated because they were not use to reconstructing there instruction to suite the educational needs of an exceptional student. According to Speece, Ritchey, Silverman, Schatschneider, Walker, and Andrusik (2010); students that are at-risk have a severe problem with phonological processes and single word reading, not always including fluency and comprehension. The largest challenge in assisting students with their learning needs in reading comprehension is identifying what process of reading comprehension is missing and need more assistance. Every student that is suffering from

grasping the skill of reading with understanding may not be easily identified; which causes the teacher not to know which reading comprehension technique to utilize while providing guided reading during the school day. It is found to be more difficult for younger students to be measured on their reading relationships of word reading and comprehension (Speece et al., 2010). As students develop and pose low performance in reading comprehension; it may cause the student to take a longer period of time to complete an assignment. If a student is progressing to the next grade level year after year failing to read with understanding can portray a image to the student that he or she are now victims to failure; which would cause the student to draw from society more that he or she contributes to it (Shuman, 2006). Diverse populations of students are faced with academic challenges; however, reading comprehension weights out the other academic content areas, which will hinder the student from performing effectively in the working world. Shuman (2006) is convinced that the average student will face struggling with reading material in a content area due to the material being very complicated for him or her to address with adequate comprehension.

### Reading Practices

Reading apprenticeship is classified as a method in which mastering reading during the day is delivered by the classroom teacher (Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011). Reading apprenticeship can be addressed through the social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge base of learning. The social aspect of learning how to read with understanding includes building a sense of safety and establishing relationships. The teacher understanding effectively of the development of the reader's level of reading

comprehension identifies the personal aspect of learning. The cognitive aspect of learning is the methods of reading strategies that are provided to the student during the learning process. Lastly, the knowledge component of learning consists of the information about specific content and the structures of academic texts. It is understood that it is important for the educator to be familiar with his or her own reading experiences so that assisting students in the classroom will not become a barrier. There are three key nuggets that will encourage the educator to feel more comfortable about their personal reading comprehension background that will help in assisting their students. Educators actively reading and responding out loud pushes educators to verbalize the reading process, making natural mental jumps explicit; educators participating in reading in unfamiliar subject areas can help educators identify stumbling blocks that may occur when their students engage in reading the material; and educators who engage in reading material with other colleagues in the same discipline area will enhance the expectations of the practice reader (Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler 2011). As educators and educational administrators become positive activist for reading apprenticeships; it will enhance the quality of reading instruction that will be provided to students on a daily basis. According to Browne, Hirsh, and Koehler (2011), an individual who seeks a deep understanding of the dynamic impact of literacy will encourage and motivate students to read independently outside the classroom; which enhances students to be proactive about the reading process, which will promote students to be active readers?

Reading comprehension has been researched for years in regard to why many students are lacking the process of reading with understanding. According to Albrow, Doolittle, Lauer, and Okagaki (2009), young readers that are learning how to read need



exposure to constant, regular spelling-sound relationships, an awareness of the nature of the alphabetic writing system, exposure to the development of spoken words, knowledgeable of the use of reading to obtain meaning from print, and read a various styles of texts with understanding while having their comprehensions and misunderstandings monitored. Understanding the learning processes of the student at an early stage of their development will help detect the student's weaknesses, therefore proper instruction can be provided to help, aid, and assist the student. Research has indicated that in order for the student to move forward with understanding word-by-word reading to reading to reading extended text with comprehension, students must also obtain substantial content knowledge (Albro, Doolittle, Lauer, & Okagaki, 2009). As students are progressing from one grade level to the next, enhancing their vocabulary is very important so that the student will be able to learn the material that's provided for them in each subject area. If students are reaching middle grades education with little or less vocabulary that's encouraged to be obtain at that grade level, the students reading comprehension skills will be labeled low performance. Catching the gap early can decrease the number of students who are matriculating through middle grades not accomplishing the skill to read with understanding. Students vocabulary are shown as low based on the socioeconomic status; which indicates that students that are three years of age that are from families with low socioeconomic status poses a vocabulary size of 525, when others from high socioeconomic status poses a vocabulary size of 1,116 words (Albro, Doolittle, Lauer, & Okagaki, 2009). When students enter kindergarten, there vocabulary on average should be 8,000 words, however many students are not obtaining these qualifications. Studies have shown that vocabulary instruction should begin in

preschool and remain a focus of instruction throughout a student's secondary education learning experience. Researchers have indicated that there may be a lack of computer tutors in many schools that would assist students on how to use linguistic cues in texts to identify multiple text structures and use that knowledge to guide the way they read a text. It is understood that not all schools have the valuable resources to enhance the quality of education. As students are developing mentally and socially, they have to understand that taking the responsibility of their own learning is very important. As students' progress from elementary to middle grades education they have to be mindful of remembering what they have read and utilizing that newly acquired information about the material they are learning, as opposed to relying only on what they already know (Albro, Doolittle, Lauer, & Okagaki, 2009).

Idioms are becoming very challenging for students that are a part of the middle grades education population. Idioms in reading comprehension are described as figurative expressions that can often take both a literal and a figurative meaning (Cain & Towse 2008). Students that are struggling with comprehension will show low performance in understanding Idiom comprehension. Reading comprehension may not be obtained for various reasons if the student does not grasp the concept of idiom comprehension. Students with poor word reading skills may struggle to comprehend the text because their slow and inefficient word reading way down limited processing resources (Cain & Towse, 2008). When students are continuing to the next grade level and are ineffective readers, the higher the grade level, the more challenging their reading will become. The texts that are giving in middle grades education are not always direct, therefore, students will have to take prior knowledge of the subject or topic and embrace their reading

understanding on what they already know. However, if a student's reading comprehension performance is below average, he or she will experience struggles with material during the middle grades. According to Cain & Towse (2008), the diverse populations of students who experience challenges in processing language in context, often have poor idiom understanding, and the presence of a supportive context motivates younger and older student's comprehension of idioms; which will take place mostly in language arts in middle grades education.

Argumentative reading practices have become a major concern for many schools throughout the United States due to public schools recent curricular reforms. Students in grades 6-12 will engage in argumentative reading during their learning experience, however, there are reading barriers that are still in place at these particular grade levels. Researchers believe that it is very important for students to be able to read material effectively in order to take a side of a hot topic and engage in a debate learning environment. Students will not be able to master this task if they are lacking reading comprehension skills, therefore effective reading instructional practices has to be in place in order for the student to master the assignment. According to Newell, Beach, Smith, and VanDerHeide (2011), argumentative reading and writing involves a student identifying a claim, supportive evidence, and assessment of warrants that's pertaining to the claim, evidence, and a situation that constitutes an argument. Students have to consume these logical processes while taking the reading section of the end-of-grade tests. Reading assessments scores are low due to the student not understanding what is being read along with the challenging vocabulary that may be involved. Students will continue to struggle with reading material if they cannot grasp the concepts such as

reflecting on an argumentative reading piece. Argumentative reading and writing practices focus beyond the traditional strategies that will assist a student to learn how to read and write. Argumentative reading is classified as a deeper knowledge of the ways in which reading, writing, language, and content collaborates (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011). Due to instructional practices not being sufficient enough for academic growth in reading, it's believed that argumentative reading and writing in school settings requires an interactive theory (Newell, Beach, and Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011).

When students are actively engaging in school assignments, more than their ability to physically perform the work interferes with their performance. There are several roles of emotions that play a vital role in fostering effective learning (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Some students often find themselves as not performing effectively like their peers and may become shy to participate in classroom assignments due to the embarrassment of not knowing how to read and being able to explain what they have just read. According to Jalongo and Hirsh (2010), reading aloud is a neutral stimulus which is constantly paired with teacher judgment and/or peer ridicule, which is considered unconditioned stimulus and with this connection the learner forms an association between reading and negative emotions. Middle school students are at the age where they feel like every event that takes place in their life at this point matters and for him or her to struggle to read in front of their peers may not seem cool. Those students that have a hard time with reading push away from reading aloud in class. As a student feeling of worry and alarm mount, and images of worst case scenarios escalate, the ability to concentrate is seriously compromised (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Appraisal emotions are those emotions

that are based on self-evaluation and if a student is receiving negative appraisal emotions; his or her ability to develop the skill of reading will not be obtainable due to the personal feelings the student has. According to Jalongo and Hirsh (2010), appraisal emotions are the evidence of the students views of those interactions and events, not necessarily the interactions/events themselves. When a student is praised on the small and large accomplishments of mastering a new skill of learning, it provides the student with encouragement to continue to press forward. Appraisal emotions are found to exert a profound effect on motivation and persistence at tasks (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Research has indicated that students who struggle with reading are immersed in material well beyond their current capabilities and as frustration builds, the curriculum undermines the student's competence and confidence (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

### Reading Achievement

Students that are viewed as literate who continue to struggle with academic reading are characterized as a “quiet crisis” (Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011). The purpose of implementing reading apprenticeships into school libraries is to allow the librarians to become more active in student learning followed by playing a key role in literacy instruction, while reconstructing the school library media programs to ensure that all students are successful (Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011). With the school librarians becoming more active in the learning process of the students that attend the library can decrease the numbers of students who are entering middle grades education with low reading levels. Research indicates that 75% of eighth graders in 2009 could read at or above the basic level, while 32% read at or above a proficient level, and only 3% read at advanced level (Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011). Tackling the statistics to increase the

numbers of students to perform above their grade level are many educational goals for schools across the nation. With the support of teachers in all background disciplines to point out the complex ways they interact with texts and make it known to students can start a path to redirect the student in the right direction to seek assistance with his or her inability to read with understanding.

#### Reading Readiness.

Reading readiness can be affected by several different factors. Reading is the basic tool of education whether it is formal or informal (Akubuilu, Okorie, Onwuka, & Uloh-Bethels, 2015). Reading holds a significant amount of importance, considering the fact that today's children spend hours trapped behind distractions such as televisions and computers. It is imperative that we re-establish the culture of the importance of reading in today's children. One of the important ways to establish this culture was to get them reading ready. Reading readiness, according to UNICEF (2012), is a process of preparing a child for reading and encouraging the child to remain engaged and read consistently. Reading readiness includes the maturation of mental, physical and socioeconomic factors. All children begin to learn to core reading skills at birth while they are listening to the speech and dialogue around them (Akubuilu, Okorie, Onwuka, & Uloh-Bethels, 2015). The acquisition of language is natural, but the process of learning to read is not; which means, reading must be taught explicitly.

Since reading means giving accurate meanings to words with accurate speed, success in reading is highly dependent upon pre-reading activities. The concept of pre-reading stems out of the belief that all children go through learning experiences before they actually begin to read. All pre-reading activities are the experiences that prepare

children for actual reading tasks (Christopher et. al, 2015). There are several ways to improve reading readiness in children. One of the ways to improve reading readiness is to make it fun for all children. This can be done by singing and talking about reading while allowing the child to read to you. Reading to children with expression also promotes fluency and comprehension (Christopher et. al, 2015). Even if the child is not ready or able to sit still for more than a moment of two, read as long as long as you can and choose from a variety of books. Learning to manipulate sounds in spoken language is an important element in child reading readiness as well.

Children struggle to read for many reasons. Among one of the most obvious reasons, stems from the teachers' inability to help children. Children may struggle to read due to their limited experience with books, speech and hearing problems, and phonemic awareness among others. In order for an individual to be a good reader, especially a child, one has to be phonemically aware, understand alphabetic principles, and apply those skills in at a rapid pace (Akubuilu, Okorie, Onwuka, & Uloh-Bethels, 2015). Overall, reading readiness is an act that manifests in a child's early development. The development should be enhanced by parents and language instructors. Reading is an invaluable asset to any child who desires to be knowledgeable and explore the world. It takes a solid parent, teacher, child effort to help students become reading ready.

Furthermore, predicting which children will struggle in reading and which will excel is a major goal of research. Reading is generally a learned skill that builds upon a child's early language and cognitive development. Skills in pre-readers are predictors of future reading levels and could help facilitate the understanding of why children vary in terms of their later reading abilities. The overall individual differences in pre-reader's

knowledge of print, rapid naming, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and verbal memory accounts for a significant account in terms of how well children read and spelled at the end of first grade and at the end of fourth (Christopher et. al, 2015). A study reasoned that this was the basis for stability in terms of reading, and that the common deficiencies stemmed far from environmental influences and genetic make-up of children. This study also reasons that the post first grade word reading was distinct to post fourth grade differences in reading comprehension at the end of fourth grade. Students who have access to consistent and early literacy education, are able to battle the genetic influences as they become least important in the determining of their future reading success. This helps to explain how children can experience difficulties in reading due to a variety of factors beyond their environmental influences (Christopher et. al, 2015).

Additionally, students are also influenced by the quality of instruction they receive throughout their early grade years. One of the most influential components of reading instruction is the type of questions children are asked as follow-ups after reading (Gilson, Little, Ruegg, & Bruce-Davis, 2014). In a study, elementary teachers questioning of their students was examined during instruction. The purpose of this study was to explore the different type of follow-up questions teachers were asking during reading conferences and to discover the different types of questions of students at different reading levels. All students were fielded with questions addressing both higher and lower level thinking, which shows that students should experience a high range of readiness level questions to higher level thinking questions (Gilson, Little, Ruegg, and



Bruce-Davis, 2014). Among all of the questions asked, the higher level thinking questions yielded a greater increase in among the comprehension of the students.

Learners that achieve literacy from pre-k to grade two increases their academic success rate in all subject areas. All subject areas are a part of the literacy discipline. A learner who struggles with the building blocks of reading comprehension/literacy will have a hard time during testing grades that requires the learner to read with understanding in order to perform critical thinking and select the best solution for the problem (Christopher et. al, 2015). Positive effects of early literacy and achievement will result in the types of professions the youngsters may be interested in when they become adult learners. Most importantly; mastering literacy during early grades education will also enhance the learner ability to achieve in grades nine through twelve so that they are academically prepared to apply and pursue greater opportunities after high school completion. The effects of early literacy and achievement will determine long term how successful the learner will be in his or her reading and writing. Both skills are significant to obtain more knowledge as it will increase each grade level.

Hausheer, Hansen, and Dumas (2011) reasoned that, in addition to supporting students' reading skills, it was also important to provide evidence for the efficacy of the reading programs. In addition to the aforementioned, successful strategies instructional strategies contribute to successful implementation and literacy achievement for students. Some of the strategies that contribute to the success of schools are:

- 1). Small interactive group instruction
- 2). Direct questioning and responses
- 3). Breaking tasks into smaller components

- 4). Designating extended periods of time focusing on reading
- 5). Receiving effective and timely feedback

#### Empirical Research

In January of 2005, Bennett Woods Elementary School enrolled 296 students in grades kindergarten through grades five. The school served predominately middle-class families, with at least 10% of the families living in poverty. A study was done of this school, in part, because they had the highest 2004 combined reading and writing achievement on the state test of schools in the area. The study showed that 95% of the students passed the Grade 4 reading test, 91% of the students passed the Grade 4 writing test (Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret, 2007)

Four researchers conducted the study at the school and concluded that many factors could be attributed to the success of the school. One factor that was mentioned centered upon the noticing of the physical and administrative setting that supported the curriculum and instruction that was delivered (Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret, 2007)

The overall function of any school depends on the people and the various players (teachers and staff) take up a large part of the success. Schools must realize that in order for success to take place, the teachers must implement with fidelity and remain intensive throughout. Some other factors that were noted are as follows:

- 1.) Students were well-prepared
- 2.) Principal and staff were motivating
- 3.) Determination to prepare students for state tests
- 4.) Teachers took advantage of professional development

- 5.) Effective Support Teachers
- 6.) Reading Specialist were present
- 7.) Students were able to experience many books
- 8.) Much teaching of reading
- 9.) Focus was on letter sounds, phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension
- 10.) Instruction was grouped as well as individualized

As with the study conducted on Bennett Woods Elementary School, there were also other similar approaches to successful literacy program implementations in schools. In terms of effective schools, there must also be a focus for effective literacy programs. According to Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, and Pan (2013), there must also be a focused placed on the areas of literacy instruction. The faculty and staff of schools must be committed to providing intense and meaningful instruction to meet the needs of various learners.

In comparison, literacy programs must be supported through extensive professional development and collaboration among the faculty (Beltramo, 2012). Hausheer, Hansen and Dumas (2011) reasoned that schools must focus on the five areas of literacy instruction were fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation. Both studies reason that the five areas of literacy must be addressed in order to be successful. Both action research studies provided information on the success of schools with literacy programs.

According to Pressley, Mohan, Raphael and Fingeret (2007), effective literacy programs consisted on committed people, the principal, teachers and staff, and parents. Students must commit and motivated to learn. Principals in effective schools must be

transformational in helping to ignite a positive school culture. Principals in effective schools allowed the most knowledgeable teachers in the building about reading and the reading specialist to be in charge of the much of the reading/literacy program. Classroom teachers also sought out and took advantage of professional development to increase their knowledge of literacy programs. Teachers were also driven and determined that their students would do well on the high stakes tests so they did more to prepare them accordingly.

Effective schools are also housed with effective support teachers that assist the classroom teacher and help supplement the instruction. Schnorr and Davern (2005), states that collaboration among teachers is very important in the literacy success of all students. In a 2005 study on the creation of exemplary literacy classrooms through the power of teaching, it was stated that two teachers, one regular classroom teacher and special education teacher found success through the team teaching approach (Schnorr & Davern, 2005). The two teachers' team taught during their daily reading block for 50 minutes each day. The two teachers explored best practices such as guided reading, flexible grouping, and independent reading. All of these best practices should be present in all literacy programs. Effective collaboration is grounded upon the idea of shared knowledge and beliefs about literacy achievement.

Lastly, parents also play a major role in literacy achievement of students. Schools who invited parent participation allow for more motivated students as it relates to reading acquisition. Most teachers, administrators, and parents believe that family involvement is important (Epstein, 2001). In a longitudinal action research study conducted by Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, and Weiss (2006) it was stated that there was strong evidence for the

value of the parental involvement on literacy performance. Parents who were involved tend to be well aware of their child's difficulties and strengths. High levels of parental involvement appeared to be a more important factor in the increasing motivation of the students in terms of literacy achievement in the 2006 study done by Dearing, Kreiderioo, Simpkins, and Weiss. Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres (2008) served as a theoretical framework for the fact that the context of family, school, and community interacting influences students learning. Epstein stated that when the spheres overlap frequently with interactions with each other, there is a greater chance that the students will receive a common message as it relates to school and literacy achievement.

#### Literacy Acquisition.

As students move through the primary school into secondary school the expectation exists that they can read (Rennie, 2016). With the misconceptions of learning and complex demands, coupled with the expectations that students can read, some students move on lacking the necessary literacy skills. Considering the aforementioned misconception, along with the barriers students face with reading and language acquisition, it is increasingly important that explicit literacy instruction is provided in schools. Some of the factors that make an influence on the level of implementation of literacy programs are classroom management and teacher decision making. Social, historical, psychological, philosophical, and political factors all set the state for various literacy outcomes (Danita & Karen, 2012). In the response to addressing the literacy demands of secondary education, schools have experimented with developing whole school approaches to literacy teaching (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013).

Previous research has indicated that teachers lack a common definition for balanced literacy and also an overall understanding of literacy instruction (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013). Teachers must fully understand the components of a literacy program in efforts to implement a program correctly. Teachers must understand that literacy work stations are the basis for literacy instruction (Kracl, 2012). Students must be actively engaged and performing tasks on their respective reading levels (Worthy et. al., 2015).

A study was done with participants that were recruited from one school district in a mid-sized Midwestern town with a population of 2500 kindergarten through fifth grade; students were from various socioeconomic levels (Danita & Karen, 2012). Four first grade teachers participated in the implementation of literacy workstations and each teacher was observed during small group instruction prior to receiving professional development covering the Diller approach to reading groups. The four teachers volunteered to seek professional development to enhance their skills in literacy implementation.

When the literacy instruction was implemented, the first barrier that the teachers faced was determining how to differentiate literacy instruction while meeting the needs of diverse learners. When initiating any type of small group instruction, the first challenge for teachers is to be able to manage the classroom and be able to work in a focused, uninterrupted environment with a group of students (Danita & Karen, 2012). In comparison, it seems as though Diller's Model for Literacy Work Stations was significant in the implementation of programs in other studies as well. Along with being able to

manage groups and provide students with meaningful learning, teachers must be able to keep students on task (Worth et. al., 2015).

On the other hand, in a study that included two first grade teachers implementing literacy work stations, there were similar challenges faced. Teachers in this particular study of two first grade teachers in a rural district, revealed that teachers could not adequately define balanced literacy programs and their overall practices were important in helping districts make research based improvements to help student achievement (Danita & Karen, 2012). Along with knowledge of literacy programs, teachers' instruction and classroom management were also major components for successful literacy programs. During literacy instruction, it was also noted that students were responsible for their learning during the centers while still being expected to facilitate complex thinking and growth (Worth et. al., 2015). Researchers of both aforementioned studies reference the Diller Model of Stations leading to achievement as opposed to seatwork.

Previously, teachers had been accustomed to providing students with seat work while in reading groups. Diller's model brought upon significant improvements in the overall structure of literacy programs. Many researchers have reasoned that work stations are best suited for literacy programs due to the fact that fewer challenges emerged as the students were engaged. The level of productivity was higher as well (Danita & Karen, 2012). According to Gregory and Chapman (2007), a center is a collection of materials designed with a purposeful goal in mind; the objective of literacy groups is to achieve in literacy and close the achievement gaps if possible. The meaningful work stations provide hands-on experiences for learners to:

- Remediate, enhance and extend knowledge on a skill or concept
- Pursue interests and explore a plethora of knowledge
- Work at the level of need and be challenged
- Be creative and critical problem solvers
- Make choices, establish own paces, and build endurance
- Manipulate a different variety of materials (Danita & Karen, 2012).

In the examinations of both of the aforementioned studies, literacy work stations were aligned to Diller's suggestions. There were also other instructional approaches that made literacy achievement of students thrive. In a study done on Reading First and none Reading First schools, it was also found that the functioning and structure of the literacy programs were equally important as mentioned in the two previous studies (Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008).

Within the study of the Reading First and Non- Reading First schools, the diagnostic/prescriptive approach to literacy was introduced. Each of the schools had a standard and attempted to provide the best reading instruction based on best practices. Although there were differences among the demographics of the schools, the results in testing were similar (Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008). The testing data from the schools showed that the students grew. The researchers attributed the growth to the teachers' willingness to implement the reading program correctly with fidelity (Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008). Collectively, the three studies' successes were due to the fact that all teachers implemented the reading programs with fidelity.



## Instructional Practices.

Teaching reading and writing in small groups has been known to be an impacting form of differentiated instructional practices to assist in the creation of independent readers. In Jennifer Serravallo's book, *Conferring with Readers: Supporting Each Student's Growth and Independence* (2007), she described five profound beliefs about what reading instruction should look like and what it should accomplish. Serravallo based her beliefs to the following five tenets:

1. Match individual readers
2. Teach toward independence
3. Teach strategies explicitly so that readers become proficient and skilled
4. Value time spent, volume, and variety of reading
5. Follow predictable structures and routines

Calkins (2000) and Serravallo (2010), both reasoned that students must be provided with strategies and instruction that fosters engagement and room for independency. Calkins (2000) and Collins (2004) reasoned that we should pull groups of students together not because they are reading the same book or at the same level, but instead they would benefit from the same strategy. Within reading instruction, strategies played a major role in the development of children. It was also found that some teachers confuse strategies with guided reading; or, some teachers call small group work "guided reading". Guided reading is much different in the structure than that of strategy lessons (Serravallo, 2010).

## Small Group Reading Instruction

There are several benefits to small group reading instruction that could help students become fluent readers. In comparison, as mentioned by Seravallo (2010) and Calkins (2000), small group instruction addressed instructional goals by matching student needs with a purpose and method, it created efficiency among students, and allowed students to feel as though they were a part of a team. Small Group instruction in reading should be conferring. A well-ran small group in reading seems more like a conference than anything else. The conference allows for students to meet with other students or teachers to be provided with support as they work to acquire new learning. One important key to small reading groups is for the teacher to see the students as individuals in efforts to meet their specific needs. Tomlinson (2001) reasons that differentiation means that the teacher understands that each student takes in information differently, make sense of ideas and also express their learning in many different ways.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel identified five pillars, or components of reading instruction that led to the highest chance of reading success. Due to the high demands of the Common Core State Standards, the sixth pillar was proposed to be added to the components of reading instruction, which is knowledge development (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). It is evident that knowledge supports every aspect of reading, including reading accuracy and fluency to help with literal and influential comprehension. The Common Core State Standards focused on four pillars: Strong content knowledge, a cluster of standards, standards for reading informational texts, and narrative texts. These features help to support a focus on knowledge development as the sixth pillar of reading instruction (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). One way to incorporate knowledge as part of the

ELA instruction is to link texts that students use in learning to and write with content area instruction. There is substantial evidence that links literacy instruction and content area learning as beneficial for students' literacy development. This helps to promote conceptual understanding rather than facts alone.

In a study of a metropolitan school district, a reading clinic was done and conducted in small guided reading groups for elementary students below grade level. Within the group sessions, there were lessons planned that were designed for students to interact with the whole text in a number of ways, with varied levels of instructional support. Students who struggle to read must be provided with instructional support. In reading, these scaffolding opportunities include read aloud and modeled reading, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading (Gaffner, Torres-Elias, & Dryden, 2014). During this process of read aloud, the teacher is usually in full control of the text and modeling fluency and focusing on comprehension. In the guided reading groups, the teacher plans the teaching and learning interactions carefully. For struggling readers, small group reading instruction outside of the general classroom is normally indicated as intervention for elementary reading struggles, particularly students who do not progress in reading at the same rate as their peers (Gaffner, Torres-Elias, & Dryden, 2014).

Reading Programs/ Core Curriculum/Common Core Standards.

In 2002, Chula Vista District purchased a new basal reading series; this series was adopted in response to student achievement across 44 schools improving when an instructional framework was developed and implemented through professional development. The Common Core State Standards National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) made it known that

comprehension instruction must be the main focus of literacy instruction, beginning before kindergarten (Robertson, Dougherty, Ford, & Paratore, 2014). In a survey of 40 state education agencies, it was determined that 37 states were struggling to provide professional development for teachers. In 2002, Chula Vista School District was provided with 120 hours of professional development on how to use their instructional materials from their new reading series. This was put into place to help ensure that teachers were equipped with the necessary strategies to teach students literacy effectively. Included as a follow-up of the professional development sessions, where classroom visits and feedback provided to ensure fidelity of instruction.

Testing and curricula changes in public school systems have had an effect on the academic growth of students. During the 2011-2012 academic school year, Texas public schools began administering the State of Texas Assessment for Academic Readiness in grades 3 through 8. A recent study on schools in in this district have reasoned that there is a test-centric instructional shift of practices that have been caused by the adoption of this new test. During transitional periods of new test, there are uncertainties about instruction that was brought about by the implementation of the new test.

Educators in most of the United States have been grappled by the changes in curricula and student assessments that are related the Common Core State Standards. This has forced literacy professionals to move past the uncomfortable transitional space between testing systems and changes that will abruptly change the mode of instruction (Robertson, Dougherty, Ford, & Paratore, 2014). Overall, the study done in the Texas public school system proved that the transition from one testing system to another affect students' growth.

As the new Common Core State Standards have taken affect in most states, all students at each grade level will be held to the same high standards for literacy achievement. Raising the bar for students' literacy achievement also raised the standards for educators as well. The challenge that most educators are facing, is having the ability to understand and implement the types of instructional practices that are needed to support struggling readers (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

Subsequently, one program that has been implemented in many schools to help with literacy acquisition and reading comprehension is an Accelerated Reader Program (AR). AR is a supplementary program designed to build fluency and comprehension (Foster & Foster, 2014). There are many studies showing positive correlations between strong readers and time spent reading. A study was done to evaluate the significance of how much the reading growth that students achieved could be attributed to AR. Jonathon Bullock (2005) investigated the effects of AR on student reading performance in grades 3 through grade 5 in one Oregon elementary school (Foster & Foster, 2014). Within this randomized study with a control group set up to examine whether using AR would influence reading fluency and comprehension over a ten week period, he found no significant difference between the control group and students who did not use AR. This study contained several limitations, with one being that only one school was used in the study. Another concern is the idea of implementation of the program with fidelity (Foster & Foster, 2014).

#### Reading Assessments

On the other hand, DIBELS was used with ELL in an elementary school using 2, 649 students. DIBELS is a program that is designed to predict the measure of fluency

(words read) and comprehension of texts(Scheffel, Lefly, & Houser, 2016). DIBELS supplements a comprehensive curriculum and is used as a progress monitoring tool. The correlational findings in this study were strong, as there was a positive relationship between students who used DIBELS consistently and were given the grade ORF test (Scheffel, Lefly, & Houser, 2016). The school used cutoff scores to help gauge the level of proficient fluency at each grade level. The study suggests that the DIBELS can be used to classify the English Language Learners who are at risk for reading failure. DIBELS is useful, especially in the early grades, with the identifying of at risk readers for underachievement in reading comprehension.

Furthermore, there have been many attempts to show that reading practice improves reading ability. During this study, Michael L. Kamil reviewed research on how to improve the literacy of children in grades 4-12 (Foster & Foster, 2014). The main factor that was determined was the idea of children being motivated to read. Motivation turned out to be especially important in developing the reading skills of adolescents. However, students who are not motivated to read, they will not benefit from reading instruction (Foster & Foster, 2014).

### Concept and Study Analysis

The major research studies relating to (1) Instructional Practices & Literacy Acquisition, (2) Reading Readiness, (3) Reading programs can be found in the charts below. All of the major categories of studies are related in showing how instructional practices, reading programs, and reading readiness are all correlated.

Table 1.

*Studies Related to Instructional Practices & Literacy Acquisition*

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
-------	---------	--------------	---------------------	----------

Rennie (2016)	Explores a whole school approach to teaching literacy.	8 students, aged 12-14 years who participated in a reading program informed by sociocultural and cognitive theories of reading.	<p><u>Quantitative:</u> 12 students who began the program in 2013 were given the survey entitled Guthrie Motivations for Reading Questionnaire to test their mean scores of different motivations.</p> <p><u>Qualitative:</u> Pre and post program interviews were conducted to determine which students were reading more, talk about how they were applying what they learned to the curriculum areas.</p> <p>Short-term study</p> <p>Descriptive Statistics</p>	<p>Described a program that was specifically designed for readers who had experiences years of finding reading difficult.</p> <p>Students' motivation to read affects performance.</p> <p>Students must be given opportunities to learn new concepts.</p> <p>Interviews show that students must be given the experience to help them understand.</p> <p>Lack of reading abilities was associated with lack of experiences to understand what reading looks like.</p> <p>The collaboration between the school and university provided a positive, productive and eye-opening learning experience for pre-service educators. Increased confidence occurred for many of the</p>
Gaffner, Torres-Elias & Dryden, (2014)	Examines the effects of collaborative efforts between a large metropolitan school district and the school of education at an area	37 students from an elementary school and college education program.	<p><u>Quantitative:</u> Two dependent variables using elementary students, FP-BAS reading level and ISIP-ERA scores, were examined at two points in time. The variables were normally distributed using</p>	





Table 2.

*Studies Related to Reading Readiness*

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
-------	---------	--------------	---------------------	----------

Akubailo, Okorie, Onwuka & Uloh-Bethels (2015)	Study identified factors such as socioeconomic background, physical abnormalities, mental imbalance, and lack of interest with symbols and teachers inability to help children as causes of reading readiness deficiency in children.	Children with reading readiness deficiency.	<p><u>Descriptive Analysis:</u> A study was done to find ways to improve reading readiness in children.</p> <p>The Ontario government proposed to show how the act of literacy acquisition is not natural.</p>	<p>There is an association with making reading fun and reading readiness.</p> <p>Read-alouds are in direct relation to increasing reading abilities.</p> <p>Learning to manipulate sounds and decoding</p> <p>Children struggle to read due to limited experiences; therefore, they must be provided experiences with books.</p> <p>Lack of interest in reading is also a factor that affected reading readiness. Teachers are not equipped to help struggling readers.</p>
Christophers et. al., (2015)	The study explored the environmental and genetic etiologies of the longitudinal relations between pre-reading skills and reading	489 students were used in the study and tested as pre-kindergartners.	<p>Qualitative: Self-reported analysis of pre-reading skills of pre-kindergartners, first graders, and post fourth graders.</p> <p>Quantitative: Increased reliability pre-reading measures</p>	Individual differences in pre-readers' print knowledge, rapid naming, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and verbal memory accounted for substantial



Table 3.

*Studies Related to Reading Programs*

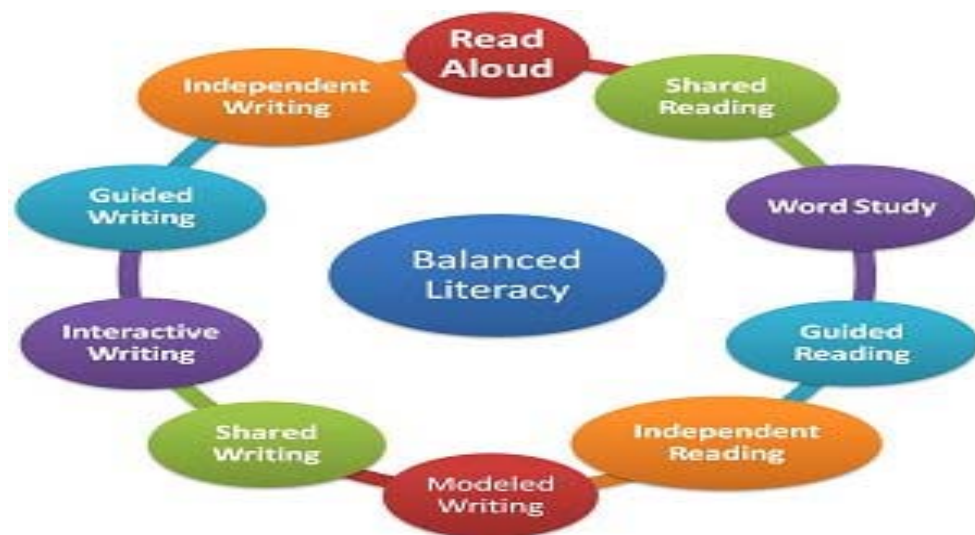
STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANT	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Scheffeil, Lefly & Houser (2016)	The study addresses the extent to which subtests on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills Assessment (DIBELS) predict student success in measure of reading comprehension.	2, 649 English Language Learners of elementary students were assessed on a reading comprehension measure of students who possessed the most challenges in one of the Western States in the United States.	Descriptive and analytic statistics were generated included bivariate correlation analysis split by language proficiency.  Cross tabulations of CSAP and DIBELS Categories	Correlations among the third grade ORF tests for (Fall, Winter, Spring) were strong. Between the DIBELS and CSAP test, DIBELS subtests are better at predicting success. DIBELS is effective in identifying English Language Learners that are at risk for underachieving in reading.

## Summary

From reviewing the literature on the effectiveness of literacy, the importance of literacy acquisition for children, instructional practices, and reading programs, studies have revealed that the best way to provide literacy instruction is to have intervention programs and small group reading instruction that is implemented with fidelity. Several literacy programs that were included in the literature review have proven successful, pending upon the knowledge of the teachers and school personnel involved. The literature in terms of core curriculum and reading programs also serve as a cornerstone

for success in terms of literacy acquisition. Core reading programs and standards, particularly Common Core State Standards, have changed the way we teach and altered the achievement of students.

Researchers indicated that reading interventions and literacy instruction could be a solution to helping children become better readers. Literacy instructional fidelity plays a major role in the teacher's perception of literacy instruction. The success of all students will depend upon the way the instruction is implemented. Research has greatly proven that teacher perceptions about literacy instruction and state standards play a significant role in the success of literacy learning. There was also a correlation among how students perform overtime. Students do not begin to struggle once they reach grade four. There must be an understanding of the exact problems that are hindering the adequate progress of our students by the time they reach fourth grade.



*Figure 3: Instructional Practices*

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will present the methodology of this study, investigate the research questions, and rationale for the use of a mixed method design and examine the use of instructional strategies in literacy instruction. Data included information from surveys and follow-up interviews. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher's plans were reviewed by the institution's IRB. IRB committees exist on campus to ensure the federal regulations are adhered to, providing for protection against human subjects' violation ( Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

#### Research Questions

The following research questions were used to focus and guide this study:

1. What are some instructional practices used by fourth grade reading teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?
2. How does the instructional practices of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System perceivably impact the literacy acquisition of struggling readers?

#### Research Design

A mixed methods approach to this research is appropriate, being that multiple perspectives are involved and the overarching importance to study the situation in context. It is appropriate to use mixed methods when there is a need for an in-depth view

of the topic and when there is a desire to show relationships. Mixed Methods research is also the most appropriate method as the researcher is attempting to analyze a process over a period of time and the researcher wants to focus on the views of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). This study takes on a transformative design, with the quantitative data collection and analysis being followed up with qualitative data collection and analysis interpretation.

Additionally, mixed methods research methods are often used in smaller samples of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research will remain flexible and allow themes to emerge as the processes of the study develop. Mixed method studies have descriptive, narrative reporting that include the presence of the researcher and offer implications for use of the research and further study in the area. This study concludes with interviews of selected participants that will help to postulate the experiences of teachers at local elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System.

The researcher proposes to carry out this research in three parts. First, the researcher will examine instructional practices of literacy instruction of fourth grade teachers using a survey. Second, the research will interview selected teachers and to recap the lived experiences of teachers at local elementary schools to help determine the relationship among the data. Third, the researcher will examine the correlative experiences of teachers in grade four in terms of their instructional practices in reading classrooms for interpretation purposes.

Quantitative and qualitative research differs in the approach taken to explore many research questions. Inductive reasoning is involved in qualitative studies where the researcher seeks to interpret or understand the perspectives to reach an overall



understanding of the problem at hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher's role is one of active participation, as the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012).

*Table 4.*

*Research Confirmation Table*

Research Question	Instrumentation/Analysis	How will the strategy answer the research question?
1. What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?	QUAN – Closed Ended Survey Questions	Numeric data from QUAN surveys provided information regarding the frequency of various instructional strategies
	QUAL- Open Ended Interview Questions	Narrative data from the QUAL interviews provided thematic similarities and differences in the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers.
2. How does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System perceivably impact the literacy development of struggling readers	QUAL- Open Ended Interview Questions	Narrative data from the QUAL interviews provided thematic similarities and differences in terms of the impact the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers on struggling readers.

### Population

The population of this study included teachers who are employed at the local elementary schools. All of the schools, with the exception of one, were Title I schools

that serve minorities (African Americans). Over ninety-two percent of the district's students are minorities. The schools have over 40 teachers, with over half being African Americans.

Teachers were selected based upon teaching of fourth grade reading in the 12 elementary schools. Participants were all teachers at the schools. Teachers are defined as individuals who facilitate the learning process of students. Students are pupils who attend the school and receive direct instruction. Other teachers were excluded because of not having had experience teaching grade four reading.

The research sites were twelve elementary schools in Dougherty County, who house grades K-5 students. The combined enrollment between the schools is 6,600 students (2016-2017). The district has over 15, 628 students district wide, with 87% being African Americans, 9% Caucasians, 4% other; and 81% being economically disadvantaged; all three schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Georgia Accrediting Commission (GAC).

### Participants

The participants for this study were teachers of fourth grade reading in 12 local elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System. The researcher chose grade 4 due to extensive experience teaching this grade level and the overall occurrences of teaching students basic foundational skills that perceivably should have been learned in the foundational grades of K-2. The participants were chosen because of their experience teaching reading to fourth grade students. Participants were likely to respond because it would also help them to get an understanding of instructional strategies that could be

implemented and strategies that are in use by other participants, which could possibly help them to close the achievement gap in terms of literacy acquisition.

### Sample

A purposeful sample was selected from the population of teachers in grade 4 for the study from the 12 rural elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System who teach struggling readers. A purposeful sample focuses on smaller overall numbers of participants, but places an emphasis on the inquiries of the participants' context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the sample was chosen based on the content in which the teachers teach on a daily basis, which focuses on reading and literacy. The participants responded in depth, due to the opportunity to provide their experiences and feedback on our current standards that could possibly be hindering student success.

### Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was a survey derived from The Deford Theoretical Orientation Reading Survey and interview questions, which is designed to differentiate in-service teachers' use of theoretical orientation reading practices (Deford, 1985). The Deford Theoretical Orientation Reading Survey utilizes 28 survey questions and 15 interview questions. The reliability of the instrument is  $r=.98$  ( $\alpha=.80$ ) and construct validity was used to validate the theoretical orientations for reading. For the purposes of this study, the survey used fifteen closed ended questions based on predetermined response scales, utilizing a 4-point Likert scale and categories to measure the use of specific instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers. Nine questions, including one demographic question, were used for further analysis in the form of follow-

up interview questions for participants to help show a correlation among the use of instructional strategies.

The surveys were indirectly coded and voluntary; participants were given a full explanation of the study and could withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey. The surveys were done electronically, using Survey Monkey, which is a survey service used in many studies. The interviews were done over the phone using a recording device and indirectly coded. All participants were given a two week window for responses.

### Validation

Validity was maintained in this study through the development of a concrete research design. The researcher used an emergent design with a descriptive analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012). Validity in the data collection and interviews with participants involved the participants representing the phenomena of teachers who teach reading in the local elementary schools in the Dougherty County School System. Validity was maintained in this study by merging and connecting the quantitative and qualitative findings to draw a combination of conclusion among the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers.

### Data Collection

Data from the participants was collected using a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol. Surveys were conducted in the local elementary schools within the Dougherty County School System. Data from teacher surveys provides insight into the participants' experiences with use of instructional strategies for students in fourth grade reading classrooms. The data from the teacher surveys help to shape the lived experiences

of teachers in efforts to help the researcher encompass the use of instructional strategies to assist with the literacy acquisition of fourth grade students.

All results from surveys included anonymous demographic information. All data is secured and locked in a secure office on a computer. Two individuals will have total access to the data, the researcher and the faculty adviser. Participant confidentiality was and will be ensured through these safeguard measures and held to the utmost importance throughout the procedure and during the data life.

All participants were given a brief written description of the study and required to sign the Informed Consent form before they could participate (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants were informed of their right to terminate the interview at any time. If for any reason, the participant decided to discontinue participation in the study, no loss of confidentiality or repercussions were warranted for the assigned participant. The surveys were distributed via email and the researcher used Survey Monkey, which is password protected. The data will be destroyed after five years.

The researcher interviewed 8 teachers who possess 10 or more years teaching fourth grade reading in efforts to determine their lived experiences of using specific instructional strategies in fourth grade reading classrooms. This allowed the researcher to collect data about experiences, and perspectives on the readiness and performance of students through the expression of their views or personal judgments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### Data Analysis

The primary method of qualitative analysis used for this study was through the use of descriptive statistics with emerging themes. This method calls for the researcher to

allow the themes to develop throughout the data collection and analyzing processes, while engaging in activities in appropriate ways as deemed by the situation and acting as an observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There are also benefits that have arisen from conducting a study in the researcher's own school and surrounding schools. One of the main benefits was the ability to minimize effects of having an outside investigator in the classroom. There was minimal observable reaction to the researcher's presence in the classrooms.

Domain analysis was repeated throughout the study as new data were collected. Structural questions were developed. Information from this step provided the focus needed for more in- depth observations based on those structural questions. Further, an item analysis was used to represent listed items from the data collection instrument, the literature supports the instrument, and research question(s) it answered.

#### Qualitative Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis was conducted and an emergent design methodology was used. An emergent design is flexible, allowing for an understanding to develop overtime as data elements are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All data collected was read and then reread again by the researcher to obtain an overall sense of meaning before further analysis was conducted to help ensure the themes that developed are grounded in the framework of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Initial themes that were considered to be possibly related to the research questions included Common Core Standards, Georgia Performance Standards, and classroom experiences. Using a thematic analysis, the research examined the collected data, identified the what and where, and recorded any patterns or themes found in the data.

Thematic analysis involves viewing the data several times and identifying themes, then finally coding the data of the identified themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). A document analysis was conducted by the researcher from the documents collected from the school and teachers, and the interview transcripts.

### Reporting the Data

In qualitative research, the descriptive results are reported in narrative format (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher conducted interviews with open-ended questions so it was possible to combine lived experiences of the educators.

### Reliability

Qualitative research must include consistent and clear questions which align to the study's overall design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study's design must also align with the literature and research questions, and be compared to the findings of the research to what was actually found in the literature. With that in mind, the interview questions were carefully selected and aligned to answer the research questions as stated. The interview questions were:

1. Walk me through your typical reading instruction period.
2. Describe any methods for grouping your students. (rationale, frequency, effectiveness.) How often do you ability group your students, if any? Why?
3. Describe the various types of materials you use for reading instruction for struggling readers. Are they effective in addressing the needs of your readers?
4. What kinds of activities do you involve your struggling readers in for the majority of your reading instructional block? Why?

5. What instructional activities have you found to be most successful with your struggling readers?
6. What do you find most challenging during your reading instruction as you work with struggling readers?
7. If you did not have to worry about test scores, how would your reading instruction differ for teaching your struggling readers?
8. What are some strategies you use for to help your struggling readers with skill acquisition and comprehension?

Table 5 provides an overview of this alignment and the concepts from the literature addressed by each interview question.



Table 5.

Research Confirmation Table - Item Analysis

IQ	RQ	IQ relation to RQ	Supporting Literature
IQ 1	RQ1	Gaining an overview of a typical reading instructional period will provide insight into the activities and approaches used with struggling readers.	Seravallo, 2010 Meidl, 2013
IQ 2	RQ 1		Meidl, 2013
IQ 3	RQ1, RQ 2	Gaining knowledge of grouping Methods is important in examining Instructional strategies for teachers when working with struggling readers.	Browne, Hirsh & Koehler, 2011
IQ 4	RQ 1	Materials you use for reading instruction helps to answer the question related to instructional practices used by teachers.	Meidl, 2013
IQ 5	RQ 1	The activities in which struggling readers are involved in must be strategic.	Seravallo, 2010
IQ 6	RQ 1	Instructional strategies that are successful will be extremely beneficial in the examination of strategies used by fourth grade teachers for struggling readers.	Meidl, 2013 McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012
IQ 7	RQ 1		
IQ 8	RQ2	Skill acquisition is a totally different component from literacy acquisition and it is important to understand the instructional practices in place to help foster skills for struggling readers.	McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012

### Summary

In Chapter Three, the researcher presented an outline, description, and reasons why a mixed methods research design was used for this particular study. The qualitative research design in this study was conducted using semi-structured interviews, utilizing

descriptive analysis, and reports of credible data from the findings, while the quantitative design employed closed ended survey questions with predetermined scaled categories. Data was collected from the local elementary schools using close-ended survey questions. Additionally, interviews conducted with the teachers allowed the researcher to gather contextual data from the actual experiences of the participants. The researcher also described the method for collecting the student data, including how the data was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### FINDINGS

The researcher proposed to examine the instructional practices and resources of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System. The results will also help inform administrators and teachers on how or if instruction is being guided in direct alignment with state standard expectations to help meet the needs of struggling readers. The research methodology used in this study was categorized as descriptive mixed methods research. This design is a single group, qualitative phenomenological study, with a purposeful selection of subjects. The design was selected to obtain self-reported data from participants to examine the instructional strategies and perceptions of fourth grade teachers of reading in Dougherty County.

#### Research Questions

The following research question(s) were designed to assess the various aforementioned issues noted:

1. What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?
2. How does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the literacy acquisition of struggling readers?

#### Research Design

A mixed methods data analysis was conducted and an emergent design methodology was employed. An emergent design is flexible, allowing for an

understanding to develop overtime as data elements are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All interview data collected was read and then reread again by the researcher to obtain an overall sense of meaning before further analysis is conducted to help ensure the themes that are developing are grounded in the framework of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The quantitative data were descriptively analyzed, but interpreted qualitatively in the form of themes. The research methodology used in this study is categorized as descriptive mixed methods research. This design is a single group, qualitative phenomenological study, with a purposeful selection of subjects. The design was selected to obtain self-reported data from participants to examine the instructional strategies of fourth grade teachers of reading in Dougherty County.

#### Respondents

A purposeful sample was selected from a population of teachers in grade 4 for the study from the 12 rural elementary schools in southwest Georgia (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The teachers were chosen based on the content in which the teachers teach on a daily basis, which focuses on reading and literacy. Thirty participants responded to the surveys out of the forty surveys that were sent out to fourth grade teachers. This was very significant in that it produced a 75% response rate. In addition, individuals who possessed over 10 years of experience teaching reading were selected for interviews. In total, 8 teachers were interviewed and agree to the consent; all of the teachers are currently teaching in the Dougherty County School System.

#### Findings - Descriptive Data

Table 6 provides a descriptive summary of the participants' teaching experience. A total of 30 participants completed the research survey, with 17 of those participants

having 0-10 years of experience (56.7%) and 13 having more than 10 years of experience (43.3%). It is interesting to note that while the majority of the participants in this study 10 years of experience or less, a higher percentage of participants with more than 10 years of experience completed the interview (8 out of 8). Only 13.3% of participants had 21 or more years of experience.

*Table 6.*

*Participant Teaching Experience*

Teaching experience	Count	Percent
0-5 Years	11	36.7
6-10 Years	6	20.0
11-20 Years	9	30.0
21 Years or More	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

### Data Analysis Procedures

A qualitative data analysis was conducted and an emergent design methodology was employed. An emergent design is flexible, allowing for an understanding to develop overtime as data elements are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All interview data collected was read and then reread again by the researcher to obtain an overall sense of meaning before further analysis is conducted to help ensure the themes that are developing are grounded in the framework of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The quantitative data were descriptively analyzed, but interpreted qualitatively in the form of

themes. In addition, a comparison between participants with less than 10 years of teaching experience and participants with more than 10 years of experience, was made.

The two research questions were addressed by descriptively analyzing the survey and triangulating the descriptive survey results with the interview responses as outlined in the table below (refer to Table 7). Interview questions were addressed individually through open coding and then thematic analysis from the open codes. Then, the interview questions were linked to the same research question and collectively analyzed for themes across the interview questions.

#### Data Analysis

Table 7 highlights the descriptive data from the survey. The results indicate that on average, participants tended to model fluency and expression with their struggling readers most often with a mean rating of 3.47. Conversely, participants tended to correct students when they mispronounced grade appropriate words before allowing assistance from others least often with a mean rating of 2.66.

Table 7.

*Survey Descriptive Results*

Survey Item	Count	Mean	Median	Mode	Min	Max
1. A student's increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.	30	2.73	3	3	2	4
2. The modeling of fluency and expression are components of your reading instruction and lead to success in terms of comprehension for struggling readers.	30	2.87	3	3	1	4
3. When struggling readers do not know a word, you instruct them to sound out its parts immediately.	30	3.17	3	4	2	4
4. You repeat words a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure that it will become part of sight vocabulary for struggling readers.	30	3.07	3	3	1	4
5. You instruct your struggling readers to pay close attention to punctuation marks to help them understand story content.	30	2.93	3	4	1	4
6. You use the sight word flashcard drill with your struggling readers as a form of practice during your reading instruction.	30	2.80	3	3	1	4
7. You use your formal instruction in reading to ensure the adequate development of all skills used in reading.	30	3.20	3	3	2	4
8. You teach struggling readers the importance of the skills you are currently addressing in relation to the previously taught skills.	30	3.37	4	4	2	4
9. You introduce new words before they appear in the reading text.	29	3.38	4	4	2	4
10. You do a read aloud daily with your struggling readers.	30	3.00	3	3	2	4

11. Your struggling readers read in cooperative groups using texts on their level?	30	3.10	3	3	1	4
12. Your children have sustained silent reading time during instruction.	29	2.79	3	3	2	4
13. Your struggling readers receive the opportunity to choral read with an accomplished reader in the same class during instruction.	30	2.67	3	3	2	4
14. You model fluency and expression with your struggling readers.	30	3.47	4	4	2	4
15. You correct students when they mispronounce grade appropriate words before allowing assistance from others.	29	2.66	3	2	2	4

---

In addition to the quantitative descriptive data, an overall descriptive summary of each participant's transcript is provided in this section. Table 8 below provides a summary obtained from each transcript. The interview question themes will be presented in the results section.



Table 8.

*Interview Transcript Descriptive Summary*

Participant	Descriptive Summary
KR-1	12 Years of teaching. Uses ability grouping, reading stations, review before and after reading stations, differentiated instruction (meeting students where they are) and practices phonics, phonemic awareness and fluency. Uses a variety of instructional materials. Focuses on student growth and not just mastery levels.
JS-1	30 years of teaching. Utilizes a variety of different strategies and materials for instruction. Most effective is small grouping using differentiated approaches – meeting students where they are. Uses student pairing (struggling reader with accomplished reader), provides one-on-one instruction, and believes that modeling fluency and expression really helps students with reading comprehension. Testing takes away from instructional time and focuses more on a test score than actual growth. Need to make sure students understand the basics before adding on new information.
CG-1	15 years of teaching. Utilizes a variety of different strategies and materials for instruction. Uses flexible ability groups and differentiates instruction. Believes that graphic organizers, teacher reading aloud and having students work at grade level are most effective strategies. Believes it is important to struggling readers to have strategies that they can use. A technique used is to introduce the genre for the text because it sets the stage for the students to understand the structural meaning of the text. Believes that the main challenges are simply getting students to read at grade level – they get frustrated and will sometimes act out as a consequence, to avoid the task.
CW-1	10 years of teaching. Uses a variety of instructional strategies, but feels that leveled readers are most effective. Follows the Instructional Framework (opening, work session, closing). Uses ability grouping, reading stations, modeling, and differentiated instruction (meeting students where they are). Believes providing immediate feedback is important. Would prefer to spend more time on the material to make sure students understand before moving on to the next concept. Believes that biggest challenge is for struggling readers to complete an independent task that has multiple instructions.

---

DL-1	18 years of teaching. Utilizes a wide variety of different strategies and materials for instruction. Follows the “Reading Workshop Model”. Believes that it is good to group students by ability because students can be appropriately challenged. Most effective strategies for struggling readers include before, during, after reading, story maps for narratives, read-alouds, and small group reading. If no testing, would teach at the pace of the students. Biggest challenges include having enough instructional time and a lack of foundational skills.
JL-1	16 years of teaching. Uses a variety of instructional strategies and materials, but is a very strong proponent of homogeneous grouping, and believes that immediate and constructive feedback are very important. Believes that homogeneous grouping is beneficial because students are not embarrassed when making mistakes, students are more motivated, lower performing students have more confidence, acceleration and remediation flow more smoothly in the classroom, and it promotes acceptance and collaboration across a diverse group of students. Believes that students really enjoy “Quizlet” and makes sure that students understand the expectation of the standard being taught prior to delivering instruction. Believes that there are some optimal materials to be used, but the outcomes are contingent upon the rigor used in the delivery of the instruction. Believes that guided reading and reading/writing workshops are most effective for struggling readers. Believes that students can become more effective readers if they learn to summarize, annotate, analyze, and dissect the text as they read. The biggest challenge is to get struggling readers to become independent readers. Implies that testing can stymie growth – testing should be differentiated as well with a focus on growth so students feel encouraged by their growth and not discouraged by failing to meet a standard. Strategies used for helping struggling readers include “Read With Your Pencil”, where students monitor their own comprehension using prediction, citing evidence, drawing conclusions, and making inferences.
SD-1	10 years of teaching. Participant did not provide a lot of examples of different types of strategies or materials. Uses ability grouping (based on Lexile reading scores) and sometimes pairs struggling students with accomplished reader in order to increase exposure to modeling and to receive individualized support. Conducts read-alouds to provide additional modeling of fluency. Believes grouping is effective because students are able to see growth and have access to individualized help.

---

ST-1	27 years of teaching. Uses a variety of strategies and materials. Assesses student ability based on STAR data and Georgia Milestones data and groups students based on ability, but also will pair students where a struggling learner is paired with an accomplished learner. Believe that modeling fluency is very important, and provides differentiated instruction. Believes that using anchor charts, flash cards and sight words are some of the most effective strategies to use with struggling readers. Believes that the biggest challenge is not having enough instructional time. If testing was not required, would slow down the pace and bread down the standards more. Places an emphasis on increasing student attention (on-task) and engagement. Unique perspective is that students are struggling because they did not receive quality instruction previously, which causes them to get behind and lack motivation.
------	---

*Table 9.*

*Linkage of Interview Questions with Research Questions*

Interview Question	RQ	Literature
IQ 1	RQ1	Seravall, 2010 Meidl, 2013
IQ 2	RQ 1	Meidl, 2013
IQ 3	RQ1, RQ 2	Browne, Hirsh & Koehler, 2011
IQ 4	RQ 1	
IQ 5	RQ 1	Brown, Hirsh & Koehler, 2011
IQ 6	RQ 1	Meidl, 2013 McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012
IQ 7	RQ 1	
IQ 8	RQ2	McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012

## Results

The overall themes that emerged in the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews are provided in this section. The quantitative trends are presented first followed by the qualitative trends.

### Quantitative Trends

Table 10 provides a descriptive comparison of those with 0-10 years of teaching experience and those with 11 or more years of teaching. In addition, Figure 1 highlights the differences in the responses as well as the trends or profiles by group. The overall trend featured in Table 10 indicates those with 11 or more years of experience tended to have higher mean ratings than those with 10 or less, indicating that they exhibit the behavior more often. However, there were some instances in which those with less experience provided higher overall ratings (Items 1 and 3).

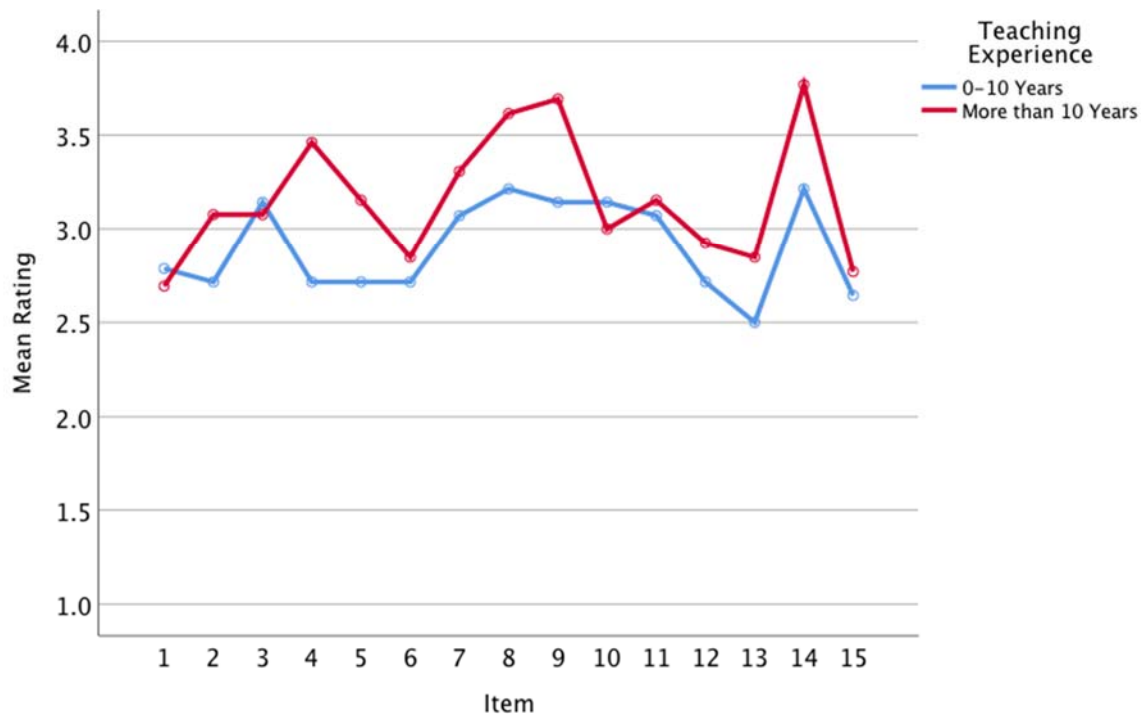
Table 10.

*Survey Comparison by Teaching Experience*

Survey Item	Mean rating	
	0-10 years	11+ years
1. A student's increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.	2.76	2.69
2. The modeling of fluency and expression are components of your reading instruction and lead to success in terms of comprehension for struggling readers.	2.71	3.08
3. When struggling readers do not know a word, you instruct them to sound out its parts immediately.	3.24	3.08
4. You repeat words a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure that it will become part of sight vocabulary for struggling readers.	2.76	3.46
5. You instruct your struggling readers to pay close attention to punctuation marks to help them understand story content.	2.76	3.15
6. You use the sight word flashcard drill with your struggling readers as a form of practice during your reading instruction.	2.76	2.85
7. You use your formal instruction in reading to ensure the adequate development of all skills used in reading.	3.12	3.31
8. You teach struggling readers the importance of the skills you are currently addressing in relation to the previously taught skills.	3.18	3.62
9. You introduce new words before they appear in the reading text.	3.12	3.69
10. You do a read aloud daily with your struggling readers.	3.00	3.00
11. Your struggling readers read in cooperative groups using texts on their level?	3.06	3.15
12. Your children have sustained silent reading time during instruction.	2.69	2.92
13. Your struggling readers receive the opportunity to choral read with an accomplished reader in the same class during instruction.	2.53	2.85
14. You model fluency and expression with your struggling readers.	3.24	3.77
15. You correct students when they mispronounce grade appropriate words before allowing assistance from others.	2.56	2.77

As previously indicated, there were two statements in which the participants in the group with less teaching experience provided a higher rating. Teachers with less experience indicated that they believe “a student’s increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension” is more frequently true than did those with more teaching experience. In addition, teachers with less experience indicated that “when struggling readers do not know a word”, they “instruct them to sound out its parts immediately” more often than those with more experience.

Figure 4 helps to provide a comparison of the two group’s profiles. As can be seen in Figure 4, the two groups had different profiles in their mean ratings given that the lines were not perfectly parallel. In other words, those in the 11 or more years of teaching experience group did not systematically rate the items higher, and the differences between the two groups was not constant across all of the items. Large differences (a difference of at least 0.5) were found between the two groups with regard to the extent to which they “repeat words a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure that it will become part of sight vocabulary for struggling readers” and they “model fluency and expression with struggling readers”. Teachers with more experience had higher mean ratings for these two items. Overall, it was noted that there was no significant disparity among novice and veteran teachers in terms of the usage of specific instructional practices, which shows that novice teachers are working hard as well in terms of implementation of specific instructional practices. Lastly, the results also indicate that a teachers’ number of years in the classroom was not a huge factor in terms of usage of instructional practices.



*Figure 4: Survey ratings by teaching experience*

### Qualitative Trends

The qualitative trends from the interviews are presented in this section of the chapter. Table 11 contains the overall themes that emerged by interview question.

Themes were determined based on similarities across participants. For example, if only one participant mentioned a particular strategy or material used, then that strategy or material was not considered a “theme”.

Table 11.

*Thematic Analysis by Interview Question*

Interview Question	Themes
IQ1. Walk me through your typical reading instruction period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on vocabulary</li> <li>• Explanation of standard</li> <li>• Discussion of text genre</li> <li>• Application of strategies (fluency &amp; comprehension)</li> <li>• Reading stations</li> <li>• Ability grouping</li> <li>• Paired grouping</li> <li>• Modeling fluency</li> <li>• Differentiated instruction</li> <li>• Group students based on ability (e.g. homogeneous grouping)</li> </ul>
IQ2. Describe any methods for grouping your students. How often do you ability group your students, if any? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired grouping (accomplished reader with struggling reader)</li> <li>• Use formative and formal assessment (e.g. STAR &amp; Lexile)</li> <li>• Group students 2-3 times per week</li> <li>• Helps provide them with more modeling (from accomplished reader), allows teacher to provide more one-on-one instruction, helps motivate students because they are with other students at the same level</li> </ul>
IQ3. Describe the various types of materials you use for reading instruction for struggling readers. Are they effective in addressing the needs of your readers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graphic organizers</li> <li>• E-books</li> <li>• Interactive websites</li> <li>• Leveled readers</li> <li>• Versa Tiles</li> <li>• Sight words</li> <li>• Phonics related materials</li> <li>• They are effective but need to be used with rigor</li> </ul>



IQ4. What kinds of activities do you involve your struggling readers in for the majority of your reading instructional block? Why?

- Small groups
- Ability grouping
- Paired grouping
- Read alouds
- Make students explain and cite their work
- Graphic organizers
- Summarizing, analyzing and predicting / compare and contrast
- Providing immediate feedback
- Modeling
- These activities optimize the amount of feedback and instruction that struggling readers receive and they help to increase engagement and motivation – result in optimal growth

IQ5. What instructional activities have you found to be most successful with your struggling readers?

- Leveled readers / differentiated instruction
- Small groups (ability and paired)
- Read alouds
- Graphic organizers

IQ6. What do you find most challenging during your reading instruction as you work with struggling readers?

- Not enough instructional time
- Students do not have the foundational skills

IQ7. If you did not have to worry about test scores, how would your reading instruction differ for teaching your struggling readers?

- Would slow down the pace and take more time on the material
- Focus more on growth than meeting a specific standard

IQ8. What are some strategies you use for to help your struggling readers with skill acquisition and comprehension?

- Graphic organizers
  - Technology based programs
  - Modeling
  - Reasoning through the text / critical thinking
  - Monitor performance
  - Teach them specific strategies
  - Connecting text and making predictions
-

In addition to the themes that emerged at the specific question level, overall themes emerged from the interviews. Table 12 provides the results for the overall themes.

*Table 12.*

*Meta-Themes based on Participant Interviews*

Theme	Description
Strategy / Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student grouping based on ability</li> <li>• Student pairing with accomplished reader</li> <li>• Modeling fluency</li> <li>• Direct instruction</li> <li>• Read alouds</li> </ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using graphic organizers</li> <li>• Technology programs</li> </ul>
Challenges / obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough instructional time</li> <li>• Testing makes the pace too fast – too much material <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can decrease engagement and motivation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Students not having foundational skills</li> </ul>

Some supporting examples from the interviews are provided. For the first theme (Strategy / Activities), an example quote is provided by Participant CW-1:

During the *opening* I spiral previous taught skills. Then, I build background and discuss the essential question for the weekly concept. During the opening I also model the vocabulary routine (*define, example, ask*). The comprehension skill and strategy is modeled and explained during the opening lesson. During the *work session*, students choose a vocabulary activity from the Vocabulary Choice Board (differentiated instruction). The literature genre is discussed and students will read the shared reading story for the week. Shared reading is done in small groups.

Most groups are student centered. Students will complete a graphic organizer that is related to the comprehension skill while reading the story. Students who are approaching reading level receive teacher guided instruction during shared reading time. During the *closing*, students may present the information they have gathered to another group. This is called pair and share.

For the second theme (Materials), a supporting quote is provided from Participant

JL-1:

Leveled readers, classroom libraries, and tiered passages are used for struggling readers. These resources allow the students to engage in lessons related to the grade level, but exposes them to content on their instructional level. They are somewhat effective in addressing their needs; however, the rigor must be applied regardless of the resource being used.

Finally, for the third theme (Challenges / Obstacles), Participant CG-1 said the following when asked about the elimination of testing:

I would only teach phonics/phonemic awareness, and sight word recognition first. Then, I would move into vocabulary, fluency, and sustained reading with books strictly on their level. I would gradually move into books they were ready for as I assessed them to see their progress and how to move them. My 1<sup>st</sup> three years of teaching (different school system) was with a program called Literacy Collaborative where children read trade books based on their level and moved on to the next level when ready.

#### Research Question 1

Research question one stated, “What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?”.

The results indicate that those with 11 or more years of experience leveraged a wider range of strategies than did those with 10 or fewer years of experience, although both groups tended to use a fairly wide variety of instructional strategies. Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, the strategies that were commonly used by the participants included introducing new vocabulary words

before they are presented in the text, modeling fluency, grouping students based on ability and pairing students, including cooperative groups, teaching students reading strategies, phonetics instruction (sounding out), read alouds, and differentiated instruction. In addition to these common instructional strategies, teachers also tended to use graphic organizers, leveled readers, and technology based programs. Some examples of the technology based programs include Interactive Quill, Quizlet, Quizzizz, McGraw Hill Connect-Ed, and Kahoot.

## Research Question 2

Research question two stated “How does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the literacy development of struggling readers?”. Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, participants believe that the strategies they are using (especially differentiated instruction, grouping and modeling) and the materials that they are leveraging (e.g. graphic organizers, leveled readers, technology based programs) are effective at impacting the reading achievement of struggling readers because they allow for students to receive incremental modeling, incremental and faster feedback, incremental one-on-one instruction, and they help students to monitor their own learning as well as think critically. The consequences of these impacts include an increase in student engagement, an increase in student motivation, and ultimately incremental growth as defined by increased reading fluency and comprehension. Some potential obstacles to achieving these goals include having to meet specific “one size fits all” standards on tests, which causes teachers to have to speed up the pace of instruction, and not having enough instructional time.

## Summary

The researcher utilized a mixed methods design, with emergent themes to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers. Forty fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System were selected for surveys. Thirty respondents participated in the study, while 8 were selected for follow-up interviews.

The researcher used surveys and interviews to address the research questions. In doing so, a correlation was determined in terms of the data from the thirty surveys and 8 follow-up interviews. Hence research question one asked, “What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?” The results indicate that those with 11 or more years of experience leveraged a wider range of strategies than did those with 10 or fewer years of experience, although both groups tended to use a fairly wide variety of instructional strategies. Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, the strategies that were commonly used by the participants include introducing new vocabulary words before they are presented in the text; modeling fluency; grouping students based on ability and pairing students, including cooperative groups; teaching students reading strategies; phonetics instruction (sounding out); read alouds; and differentiated instruction.

Finally, research question two asked, “To what extent does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the reading achievement of struggling readers?” Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, participants believe that the strategies they are using (especially differentiated instruction, grouping and modeling)

and the materials that they are leveraging (e.g. graphic organizers, leveled readers, technology based programs) are effective at impacting the reading achievement of struggling readers. The overall consequences of these impacts include an increase in student engagement and motivation to succeed.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine instructional practices, programs, and resources of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System that have a direct effect on the reading achievement of struggling readers. The results will highlight the relationship between belief and actions among teachers and how practices are influential to the development of literacy skills for struggling readers. In addition, the results will also help inform administrators and teachers on how or if instruction is being guided in direct alignment with state standard expectations to help meet the need of struggling readers.

The research methodology used in this study was categorized as descriptive mixed methods research. In addition, an emergent design methodology was employed. This design is a single group, qualitative phenomenological study, with a purposeful selection of subjects. The design was selected to obtain self-reported data from participants to examine the instructional strategies and perceptions of fourth grade teachers of reading in Dougherty County. This study was guided by two research questions: 1) What are some instructional strategies used by fourth grade teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System? 2) How does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the literacy acquisition of struggling readers? The quantitative data were descriptively analyzed, but interpreted qualitatively in the form of themes. The data were

analyzed for themes and patterns then reported based on the research questions. Results of the study will be discussed based on a comparison to past studies, as well as implications of the study results and recommendations for future research.

### Analysis of Research Findings

The researcher used surveys and interviews to address the research questions. In doing so, a correlation was determined in terms of the data from the thirty surveys and 8 follow-up interviews. Hence research question one asked, “What are some instructional strategies used by fourth teachers to help struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System?” The results indicate that those with 11 or more years of experience leveraged a wider range of strategies than did those with 10 or fewer years of experience, although both groups tended to use a fairly wide variety of instructional strategies. Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, the strategies that were commonly used by the participants include introducing new vocabulary words before they are presented in the text, modeling fluency, grouping students based on ability and pairing students, including cooperative groups, teaching students reading strategies, phonetics instruction (sounding out), read alouds, and differentiated instruction.

Finally, research question two asked, “To what extent does the instructional strategies of fourth grade reading teachers in the Dougherty County School System impact the reading achievement of struggling readers?” Based on a combination of the research survey responses and the interview responses, participants believe that the strategies they are using (especially differentiated instruction, grouping and modeling) and the materials that they are leveraging (e.g. graphic organizers, leveled readers,



technology based programs) were effective at impacting the reading achievement of struggling readers. The overall consequences of these impacts include an increase in student engagement and motivation to succeed.

### Discussion of Research Findings

This study revealed numerous similarities to the body of research described in the review of literature. Results of the this study revealed that regardless of years of experience as a reading teacher, a variety of reading strategies employed with struggling readers is imperative. Like the literature review both novice and veteran fourth grade teachers highlight the importance of reading readiness skill acquisition and quality of early literacy instruction (Akubuilu, et al., 2015; Christopher et al, 2015; Gilson et al., 2014; Serravello, 2007; UNICEF, 2012), aesthetic reading (Ryan & Dagostino, 2014), intentional and explicit vocabulary instruction (Albro, et al., 2009), systematic and explicit phonics instruction (Akubuilu, et al., 2015; Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003; Christopher et al, 2015; Frey & Fisher, 2010; Kuhn & Rasinski, 2007; Speece, et al., 2010), and read alouds for oral reading fluency (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009; Christopher et al, 2015; Gaffner, Torres-Elias & Dryden, 2014; Jalongo & Hirsch, 2010; Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007). In addition, the collective group of teachers identified the importance of teaching reading strategies to struggling readers (Calkins, 2000; Collins, 2004) and incorporating literacy work stations (Danita & Karen, 2012; Gregory & Chapman, 2007; Krael, 2012; Worth et al., 2015) similarly to other research studies.

Although there is an abundance of teaching strategies in education, this study highlights teaching strategies that support fourth grade struggling readers in literacy and reading acquisition. Previous studies and the findings of this study agree that reading and

literacy instruction should be taught explicitly (Akubuilu, et al., 2015, Christopher et al., 2015; Serravello, 2007; UNICEF, 2012), in the Zone of Proximal Development (Wass & Golding, 2014), and socially constructed (Collins, 1995; Gee, 1996). Furthermore, there is great consensus that struggling readers need intense and meaningful instruction to meet the needs of various learners (Marchand-Martella et al., 2013; Serravello, 2007) and Differentiated Instruction (Collins, 1995; Gee, 1996; Tomlinson, 2001). In addition, individualized instruction (Akinlasso, 1982; Serravello, 2007) small interactive group instruction (Calkins, 2000; Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011; Serravello, 2010), and ability grouping/reading level instruction (Worthy et al., 2015) should be implemented in classrooms for struggling readers. Teachers perhaps gained the instructional practices through experience and pre-service courses.

Although this study has many parallels to the existing body of research, there are also several notable differences. The first notable difference is the specific reading strategies identified as effective for struggling readers. While some researchers emphasize the importance of vocabulary size in general (Albro et al., 2009) or language function (Cain & Towse, 2008) the veteran teachers in this study emphasized the focus on pre-teaching vocabulary word meaning prior to reading the words in text. Other studies focused on strategies like argumentative reading and writing (Newell et al., 2011), direct questioning and responses (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011), follow-ups after reading (Albro et al., 2009; Cain & Towse, 2008; Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015; Gilson et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2014; Shuman, 2006; Worth et al., 2015), the use of higher level thinking questions (Albro et al., 2009; Cain & Towse, 2008; Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015; Gilson et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2014; Shuman, 2006; Worth et al., 2015), and the

combination of word reading fluency and comprehension instruction (Christopher et al., 2015; Gilson et al., 2014; Speece, et al., 2010; Walker & Andrusik, 2010). The most notable difference between this study and the literature is the participants of this study emphasized more word level strategies or the alphabetic principle (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000), whereas other studies in the literature review focused on reading comprehension or the five components of a comprehensive reading program(National Reading Panel, 2000). The population of struggling readers in this study required teachers to focus on learning the mechanics of reading, in comparison to other studies focus on reading for overall meaning.

Secondly, whereas, many studies indicate that teachers struggle to understand and implement the types of instructional practices that are needed to support struggling readers (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012) and lack a common definition for balanced literacy and overall understanding of literacy instruction (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013; Danita & Karen, 2012) , the participants of this study found that the variety of strategies identified and employed had a positive impact on the reading achievement of struggling readers. In addition, other classroom level differences mentioned the importance of teaching appraisal emotions (Jalongo & Hirsch, 2010), incorporating technology (Albro et al., 2009), and increasing time on task (Worth et al., 2015) for struggling readers. Other studies emphasized teaching behaviors like classroom management (Danita & Karen, 2012; Serravello, 2007), breaking tasks into smaller components (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011), designating extended periods of time focusing on reading (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011), assessment & intervention (Bullock, 2005; Foster & Foster, 2014; Scheffel, Lefly & Houser, 2016; Wood, 2006),

and maintaining effective support staff to assist classroom teacher and supplement instruction (Schnorr & Davern, 2005).

Although this study focused on instructional strategies that impact struggling readers in fourth grade classrooms, other studies mentioned notable school level differences that directly impact the classroom. Some studies attributed extensive professional development of teachers (Beltramo, 2012; Browne, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011; Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011; Robertson et al., 2014), efficacy of reading programs (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011; Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008), and school libraries (Brown, Hirsh, & Koehler, 2011) to the success of struggling readers. Other studies highlighted setting and environment of the school and administrative and curriculum support for teachers that supported curriculum and instruction (Pressley et al, 2007) having a direct impact on reading success. Lastly, researchers indicate that effective literacy programs must consist of the collaborative effort of administration, teachers, staff, and parents (Pressley et al., 2007), or family involvement (Epstein, 2001) to impact achievement (Dearing et al., 2006) and support struggling readers.

Table 13

*Relationships Among Research*

Study	Similarities	Differences
<b>Instructional Practices &amp; Literacy Acquisition</b>		
Rennie (2016)		Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explores a whole school approach to teaching literacy.</li> </ul>
		Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 students, aged 12-14 years who participated in a reading program informed by sociocultural and cognitive theories of reading.</li> </ul>
	Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy instruction</li> </ul>	Design/Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Quantitative:</u> 12 students who began the program in 2013 were given the survey entitled Guthrie Motivations for Reading Questionnaire to test their mean scores of different motivations.</li> </ul>
	Design/Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both employed quantitative and qualitative methods</li> <li>• Both short-term studies</li> <li>• Both used descriptive statistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Qualitative:</u> Pre and post program interviews were conducted to determine which students were reading more, talk about how they were applying what they learned to the curriculum areas.</li> </ul>
	Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both identified factors that support struggling readers</li> </ul>	Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' motivation to read affects performance.</li> <li>• Interviews show that students must be given the experience to help them understand.</li> <li>• Lack of reading abilities was associated with lack of experiences to understand what reading looks like</li> </ul>
	Participants from both studies indicate students must be given opportunities to learn new concepts.	

Study	Similarities	Differences
Gaffner, Torres-Elias & Dryden (2014)		<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examines the effects of collaborative efforts between a large metropolitan school district and the school of education at an area urban university</li> </ul>
		<p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different quantitative variables</li> <li>Qualitative data collection on pre-service teachers instead of in-service teachers</li> </ul>
	<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies investigate participants in urban settings</li> </ul> <p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both employed quantitative and qualitative methods</li> </ul>	<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The collaboration between the school and university provided a positive, productive and eye-opening learning experience for pre-service educators.</li> <li>Increased confidence occurred for many of the university students.</li> <li>Hands-on and real experiences were associated with the university students and district students in that the university students were able to assist and develop plans for students.</li> </ul> <p>The guided reading experience provided the pre-service teachers with experience and knowledge to work through the challenges by working with the students of varying ability levels.</p>

Study	Similarities	Differences
Study	Similarities	Differences
<b>Reading Readiness</b>		

Study	Similarities	Differences
Akubailo, Okorie, Onwuka & Uloh- Bethels (2015)	<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies had an emphasis on struggling readers</li> </ul> <p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies employed descriptive statistics for their quantitative analysis</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies highlight phonics instruction and read-alouds as a strategy that increases reading ability</li> </ul>	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study identified factors such as socioeconomic background, physical abnormalities, mental imbalance, and lack of interest with symbols and teachers inability to help children as causes of reading readiness deficiency in children.</li> </ul> <p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This study did not use both quantitative and qualitative methods like the current study</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a positive relationship between making reading fun and reading readiness.</li> <li>Children struggle to read due to limited experiences; therefore, they must be provided experiences with books.</li> <li>Lack of interest in reading is also a factor that affected reading readiness.</li> <li>Teachers are not equipped to help struggling readers.</li> </ul>



Study	Similarities	Differences
Christopher et. al., (2015)		<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study explored the environmental and genetic etiologies of the longitudinal relations between pre-reading skills and reading and spelling.</li> </ul>
	<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies looked at 4<sup>th</sup> grade students</li> </ul> <p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both employed quantitative and qualitative methods</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both studies highlighted access to consistent and formalized early literacy education is essential for reading success by the time students reached grade 4.</li> </ul>	<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population size of 489 students were used in the study</li> <li>Population used of multiple grade levels; grade level started at pre-kindergarten.</li> </ul> <p>Design/Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessed at multiple stages starting at pre-kindergarten.</li> <li>Employed a comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) for quantitative methods.</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual differences in pre-readers' print knowledge, rapid naming, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and verbal memory accounted for substantial variance in how well children read.</li> <li>With access to consistent and formalized early literacy education, genetic influences appear to be at least as important for future reading success by the time students reached grade 4.</li> </ul>

Study	Similarities	Differences
Study	Similarities	Differences
<b>Reading Assessment ( DIBELS)</b>		
Scheffeil, Lefly& Houser (2016)		Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study addresses the extent to which subtests on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills Assessment (DIBELS) predict student success in measure of reading comprehension</li> </ul>
	Participants	Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2, 649 English Language Learners of elementary students were assessed on a reading comprehension measure</li> <li>Western States in the United States.</li> </ul>
	Design/Analysis	Design/Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantitative Design using descriptive and analytic statistics were generated included bivariate correlation analysis split by language proficiency</li> </ul>
	Outcomes	Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Correlations among the third grade ORF tests for (Fall, Winter, Spring) were strong.</li> <li>Between the DIBELS and CSAP test, DIBELS subtests are better at predicting success.</li> </ul>
		DIBELS is effective in identifying English Language Learners that are at risk for underachieving in reading.

### Conclusion: Implications & Recommendations

Thorough consideration of the unique design of this study in comparison to the body of research in the literature review is also warranted, especially when considering

fourth grade struggling readers. Although there were a few studies that had a population of fourth graders (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003; Pressley et al., 2007), the majority of the research populations focused on struggling readers prior to the fourth grade (Hindman & Wash, 2008). If the population was not younger than fourth grade, they were focused on one specific grade level besides fourth grade (Rennie, 2016; Brown, Hirsh & Koehler, 2011), consisted of students from several different grades (Christopher et al, 2015; Danita & Karen, 2012; Foster & Foster, 2014) or focused on a specific type of struggling reader instead of a specific grade altogether (i.e. English Language Learners; Scheffiel, Lefly & Houser, 2016; Speece, et al., 2010). The scarce number of studies on fourth grade struggling readers validates the need for more research, in addition to the replication of the current study with a larger population size.

The urban school district population of the current study is 87% African Americans, 9% Caucasians, 4% other; no other study in the literature review had similar race/ethnicity demographics. In addition, 81% are economically disadvantaged in comparison to studies in the literature with socioeconomic status in poverty lower than 10% (Danita & Karen, 2012; Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011). Furthermore, the striking differences in socioeconomic status and race of the population in this study and the populations used in existing research provides unique evidence that is effective for 4<sup>th</sup> grade struggling readers in minority majority socioeconomic disadvantaged communities. However, more research is needed on fourth grade low performing students that come from diverse populations (race/ethnicity) in disadvantaged socioeconomic communities.

## Dissemination

The specific groups that could benefit from the findings and results of this research are the K-4<sup>th</sup> grade reading teachers, curriculum department, and administrators from the participating school district. This population would be interested in the results of the study because of the direct insight from practitioners in their own school district. Educators were given a voice to communicate the instructional practices that are being employed for struggling readers and further explain the impact of instructional practices on reading and literacy acquisition of students.

Furthermore, this study lends itself to practical and relevant information for enhancing the instructional practices of K-4<sup>th</sup> grade reading teachers. These findings can be communicated through a presentation with the results in graphs and charts, identifying relevant information from the study that could benefit the teachers from the district. A relevant starting point could also begin with pre-service teachers looking to enter the school district. One other beneficiary could be the professional learning team in the participating district. The results can also inform schools to initiate vertical planning to allow teachers to gain a better understanding of the progression of skills from K-5. The professional learning could disseminate the results of the study by email, through graphic representation or in person. Instructional leaders could use the results of this study to provide meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for K-4<sup>th</sup> grade educators, particularly 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in the district. This population could make a difference in the implementation of instructional practices, impact student learning by implementing strategies to improve upon in terms of instructional practices of reading educators in their district.

## Concluding Thoughts

Overall, it is possible to conclude from the study that there is a plethora of instructional strategies used by fourth grade teachers to help struggling readers. However, the prevalent need for word level instruction dominating literacy and reading instruction in fourth grade suggests students were struggling with reading acquisition prior to fourth grade. Difficulty with the alphabetic principle in fourth grade suggests a greater emphasis on intentional, explicit, and comprehensive reading instruction is imperative prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (Gilson et al., 2014). Since there is a void in the literature on what factors contribute to students being promoted prior to fourth grade without essential reading and literacy skills, further research is necessary so that preventative measures can be taken.

Although both novice and veteran teachers were able to identify effective instructional strategies for their fourth grade struggling readers, this study also revealed slight differences in their volume of instructional strategies identified by both teacher groups, which indicates that the number of years teaching was not a significant factor. It was quite possible that the fidelity of the implementation of the instructional strategies played an significant role in the success of the struggling readers. Even if it is possible to assume there is a relationship between the number of years and the volume of instructional strategies the difference between novice and veteran teachers suggests a deeper need, perhaps, at the pre-service level. In an effort to narrow, even close the gap of subtle differences, it is recommended that teacher preparation programs provide more adequate practice in authentic classroom settings in order to improve instructional practices of novice teachers with struggling readers.

The findings support the literature review of effective instructional strategies on struggling readers. Furthermore, this study reveals thematically that both teacher groups successfully impact student achievement of struggling readers. Although novice and veteran teachers perceive their teaching strategies to be effective for struggling readers, further research on the relationship between teacher's beliefs about their instructional practices and reading achievement of their struggling readers is needed.

## REFERENCES

- Aarnoutse, C., Van Leeuwe, J., Voeten, M., & Oud, H. (2001). Development of decoding, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling during the elementary school years. *Reading and Writing, 14*(1-2), 61-89.
- Abadiano, H., & Turner, J. (2005). Reading fluency: The road to developing efficient and effective readers. *New England Reading Association Journal, 41*(1), 50-56.
- Abernathy-Dyer, J., Ortlieb, E., & Cheek, E. J. (2013). An analysis of teacher efficacy and perspectives about elementary literacy instruction. *Current Issues in Education, 16*(3), 1-14.
- Akubuilu, F., Okorie, E. U., Onwuka, G., & Uloh-Bethels, A. C. (2015). Reading readiness deficiency in children: Causes and ways of improvement. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(24), 38-43.
- Albro, E., Doolittle, E., Lauer, K., & Okagaki, L. (2009). Reading with understanding: Research from the Institute of Education Sciences. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, 35*(2), 17-21.
- Applegate, M., Applegate, A., & Modla V. (2009). "She's my best reader just can't comprehend": Studying the relationship between fluency and comprehension. *The Reading Teacher, 62*(6), 512-521.
- Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2003). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Begeny, J. (2009). *Helping early literacy with practice strategies (HELPS): A one-on-one program designed to improve students' reading fluency*. Raleigh, NC: Helps Education Fund
- Beltramo, J. A. (2012). Response to student literacy needs at Mother of Sorrows Catholic School. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 15(2), 295-324.
- Bradford, A., & Harris, J. (2003). Cultural knowledge in African American children. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, 34(1), 56-68.
- Browne, K., Hirsh, K., & Koehler, E. (2011). Resolving the quiet crisis: Reading apprenticeships in middle and high schools. *School Library*, 27(4), 34-36
- Cain, K., & Towse, A. (2008). To get hold of the wrong end of the stick: Reasons for poor idiom understanding in children with reading comprehension difficulties. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 51(6), 1538-1549.
- Cervetti, G. N., & Hiebert, E. H. (2015). The sixth pillar of reading instruction. *Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 548-551.
- Christopher, M. E., Hulslander, J., Byrne, B., Samuelsson, S., Keenan, J. M., Pennington, R., Olson, R. K. (2015). Genetic and environmental etiologies of the longitudinal relations between pre-reading skills and reading. *Child Development*, 86(2), 342-361.
- Ciullo, S., Lembke, E. S., Carlisle, A., Thomas, C. N., Goodwin, M., & Judd, L. (2016). Implementation of evidence-based literacy practices in middle school response to intervention: An observation study. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 39(1), 44-57.



- Cutting, L., Materek, A., Cole, C., Levine, T., & Mahone, M. (2009). Effects of fluency, oral language, and executive function on reading comprehension performance. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 59(1), 34-54.
- Daniel, S., Walsh, A., Goldston, D., & Arnold, E. (2006). Suicidality, school dropout, and reading problems among adolescents. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39(6), 507-514.
- Davis, D. S., & Willson, A. (2015). Practices and commitments of test-centric literacy instruction: Lessons from a testing transition. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 50(3), 357-379.
- DeFord, D. (1985). Validating the Construct of Theoretical Orientation in Reading Instruction *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3., pp. 351-367
- Donita, S., & Karen, H. (2012). A balanced literacy initiative for one suburban school district in the United States. *Education Research International*, 2012(Article 609271), 1-9.
- Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Fives, A., Russell, D., Kearns, N., Lyons, R., Eaton, P., Canavan, J., & ... O'Brien, A. (2014). The association between academic self-beliefs and reading achievement among children at risk of reading failure. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 37(2), 215-232.
- Foster, D. K., & Foster, D. P. (2014). Estimating reading growth attributable to Accelerated Reader at one American school in the Caribbean. *Reading Psychology*, 35(6), 529-54.

- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2010). Reading and the brain: What early childhood educators need to know. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 2010(38), 103-110.
- Gaffner, J., Johnson, K., Torres-Elias, A., & Dryden, L. (2014). Guided reading in first-fourth grade: Theory to practice. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 2(2), 117-126.
- Garth-McCullough, R. (2008). Untapped cultural support: The influence of culturally bound prior knowledge on comprehension performance. *Reading Horizons*, 49(1), 1-30.
- Gass, M. (2005). Comprehending the value structures influencing significance and power behind experiential education research. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 27(3), 286-296
- Gately, S. (2008). Facilitating reading comprehension for students on the autism spectrum. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(3), 40-45.
- Gilson, C. M., Little, C. A., Ruegg, A. N., & Bruce-Davis, M. (2014). An investigation of elementary teachers' use of follow-up questions for students at different reading levels. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 25(2), 101.  
doi:10.1177/1932202X14532257
- Gischlar, K. L., & Vesay, J. P. (2014). Literacy curricula and assessment: A survey of early childhood educators in two states. *Reading Improvement*, 51(3), 291-302.

- Gray, A., & McCutchen, D. (2006). Young readers use of phonological information: Phonological awareness, memory, and comprehension. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(4), 325-333.
- Gunning, T. (2008). *Creating literacy instruction for all children*. Boston, MA: Ally & Bacon.
- Hammerberg, D. (2004). Comprehension instructors for socioculturally diverse classrooms: A review of what we know. *The Reading Teacher, 57*(7), 648-658.
- Harlin, R. (2006). When reading begins: The teacher's role in decoding, comprehension, and fluency. Ardith Davis Cole [Book review]. *Childhood Education, 82*(5).
- Hausheer, R., Hansen, A., & Dumas, D. M. (2011). Improving reading fluency and comprehension among elementary students: Evaluation of a school remedial reading program. *Journal of School Counseling, 9*(9), 1-20.
- Haycock, K. 1999. What works: Collaborative program planning and teaching. *Teacher Librarian, 27*(1).
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hicks, C. (2009). A lesson on reading fluency learned from the tortoise and the hare, *The Reading Teacher, 63*(4), 319-323.
- Higgins, E., & Raskind, M. (2004). Speech recognition-based and automaticity programs help students with severe reading and spelling problems. *Annals of Dyslexia, 54*(2), 365-392.

- Holtzheuser, S., & McNamara, J. (2014). Bridging literacy acquisition and self-regulated learning: Using a SRL framework to support struggling readers. *Exceptionality Education International*, 24(1), 2-17.
- Jalongo, M., & Hirsh, R. (2010). Understanding reading anxiety: New insights from neuroscience. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(6), 431-435.
- Kamii, C., & Manning, M. (2002). Phonemic awareness and beginning reading and writing. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17(1), 38-46.
- Keyes, S. E., Cartledge, G., Gibson, L., Jr., & Robinson-Ervin, P. (2016). Programming for generalization of oral reading fluency using computer-assisted instruction and changing fluency criteria. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 39(2), 141-172.
- Koda, K. (1998). The role of phonemic awareness in second language reading. *Second Language Research*, 14(2), 194-215.
- Koolstra, C. Tom, Vander Voot, H. A., & van der Kamp, L. J. Th. (1997). Televisions impact on children's reading comprehension and decoding skills: A 3-year panel study. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 32(2), 128-152.
- Kracil, C. L. (2012). Managing small group instruction through the implementation of literacy work stations. *International Journal of Psychology: A Biopsychosocial Approach/Tarptautinis Psichologijos Zurnalas: Biopsichosocialinis Poziuris*, (10), 27-46.
- Lee-Thompson, L.-C. (2008). An investigation of reading strategies applied by American learners of Chinese as a foreign Language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41(4), 702-721.

- Mastropieri, M., Scruggs, T., & Graetz, J. (2003). Reading comprehension instruction for secondary students: Challenges for struggling students and teachers. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 26(2), 103-116.
- Maughan, B., Rowe, R., Loeber, R., & Stouthamer, M. (2003). Reading problems and depressed mood. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 31(2), 219-229.
- McLaughlin, M., & Overturf, B. J. (2012). The common core: Insights into the K-5 standards. *Reading Teacher*, 66(2), 153-164.
- Meidl, T. D. (2013). Opting out: Examining teacher's beliefs when faced with core reading programs. *Current Issues in Education*, 16(3), 1-11.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mimran, R. (2006). Reading disabilities among Hebrew-speaking children in upper elementary grades: The role of phonological and nonphonological language skills. *Reading and Writing*, 19(3), 291-311.
- Moore, D. (2008). Understanding youth who struggle with middle school reading. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(4), 353-355.
- Morgan, P., Farkas, G., Tufis, P., & Sperling, R. (2008). Are reading and behavior problems risk factors for each other? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 41(5), 417-436.
- Nakamoto, J., Lindsey, K., & Marvis, F. (2007). A longitudinal analysis of English language learners word decoding and reading comprehension. *Reading and Writing*, 20(7), 691-719.

- Newell, G., Beach, R., Smith, J., & VanDerHeide, J. (2011). Teaching and learning argumentative reading and writing: A review of research. *Reading Research Quarterly, 46*(3), 273-304.
- Orton, J. (2000). Phonemic awareness and inventive writing. *New England Reading Association Journal, 36*(1), 17-21.
- Peters, S., & Davis, W. (1998). Help non-native English speakers understand your lectures. *College Teachings, 46*(4), 139-147
- Pflaum, S., & Bishop, P. (2004). Student's perceptions of reading engagement: Learning from the learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48*(3), 202-213.
- Piasta, S. B., Justice, L. M., McGinty, A., Mashburn, A., & Slocum, L. (2015). A comprehensive examination of preschool teachers' implementation fidelity when using a supplemental language and literacy curriculum. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 44*(5), 731-755.
- Pikulski, J., & Chard, D. (2005). Fluency: Bridge between decoding and reading comprehension. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(6), 510-519.
- Porpodus, C. (1999). Patterns of phonological and memory processing in beginning readers and spellers of Greek. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 32*(5), 406-416.
- Pressley, M., Mohan, L., Raphael, L. M., & Fingeret, L. (2007). How does Bennett Woods Elementary School produce such high reading and writing achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(2), 221-240.

- Puranik, C., Petscher, Y., Otaiba, S., Catts, H., & Lonigan, C. (2008). Development of oral reading fluency in children with speech or language impairments: A growth curve analysis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 41*(6), 545-560.
- Rankin, L. D., & Ricchiuti, L. M. (2007). Data-driven decision making: Five questions to help make sense of your data. *Classroom Connect, 14*(1), 4-6.
- Rennie, J. (2016). Rethinking reading instruction for adolescent readers: The 6R's. *Australian Journal of Language & Literacy, 39*(1), 42-53.
- Reutzel, D. R. (2015). Early literacy research: Findings primary-grade teachers will want to know. *Reading Teacher, 69*(1), 14-24.
- Robertson, D. A., Dougherty, S., Ford-Connors, E., & Paratore, J. R. (2014). Re-envisioning instruction. *Reading Teacher, 67*(7), 547-559.
- Ryan, K., & Dagostino, L. (2015). Infusing the teaching of fiction with Louise Rosenblatt's theory of aesthetic reading. *New England Reading Association Journal, 50*(2), 53-58.
- Ryder, J., Tunmer, W., & Greaney, K. (2008). Explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonemically based decoding skills as an intervention strategy for struggling readers in whole language classrooms. *Reading and Writing, 21*(4), 349-369.
- Samuels, J. (1988). Decoding and automaticity: Helping poor readers become automatic at word recognition. *The Reading Teacher, 41*(8), 756-760.
- Santa, C., & Hoen, T. (1999). An assessment of early steps: A program for early intervention of reading problems. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34*(1), 54-79.

- Scheffel, D., Lefly, D., & Houser, J. (2016). The predictive utility of Dibels reading assessment for reading comprehension among third grade English language learners and English speaking children. *Reading Improvement*, 53(2), 87-100.
- Schnorr, R. F., & Davern, L. (2005). Creating exemplary literacy classrooms through the power of teaming. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(6), 494-506.
- Serravallo, J. (2010). *Teaching reading in small groups: Differentiated instruction for building strategic, independent readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Shuman, B. (2006). A school-wide attack on reading problems. *The Clearing House*, 79(5), 219-222.
- Skaalvik, S. (2004). Reading problems in school children and adults: experiences, self-perceptions and strategies. *Social Psychology of Education*, 7, 105-125
- Snow, C., Martin, T., & Berman, I. (2008) State literacy plans: incorporating adolescent literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(1), 211-230.
- Sovik, N., Frostrad, P., & Heggberget, M. (1999). The relation between reading comprehension and task-specific strategies used in arithmetical word problems. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 43(4), 371-398.
- Speece, D., Ritchey, K., Silverman, R., Schatschneider, C., Walker, C., & Andrusik, K. (YEAR) Identifying children in middle childhood who are at risk for reading problems. *School Psychology Review*, 39(2), 258-276
- St. George, C. Y. (2009). How can elementary teachers collaborate more effectively with parents to support student literacy learning? *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 76(2), 32-37.



- Swanson, L., & O'Connor, R. (2009). The role of working memory and fluency practice on the reading comprehension of students who are dysfluent readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(6), 548-575.
- Swanson, P., & De La Paz, S. (1998). Teaching effective comprehension strategies to students with learning and reading disabilities. *Intervention in Schools and Clinic, 33*(4), 209-218.
- Sze, S. (2010). Teaching reading to students with learning difficulties. *Reading Improvement, 47*(3), 142-150.
- Valencia, S., Smith, A., Reece, A., Li, M., & Wixson, K. (2010). Oral reading fluency assessment: Issues of construct, criterion, & consequential validity. *Reading Research Quarterly, 45*(3), 270-291.
- Walczyk, J., & Griffith-Ross, D., (2007). How important is reading skill fluency for comprehension? *The Reading Teacher, 60*(6), 560-569.
- Wass, R., & Golding, C. (2014). Sharpening a tool for teaching: The zone of proximal development. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(6), 671-684.  
doi:10.1080/13562517.2014.901958
- Webster, J. (2001). Effects of ninth graders culture-specific schemata on responses to multicultural literature. *The Journal of Educational Research, 95*(1), 12-25.
- Westwood, P., Knight, B. A., & Redden, E. (1997), Assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy acquisition: The development of the teachers' beliefs about literacy questionnaire (TBALQ). *Journal of Research in Reading, 20*, 224-235.  
doi:10.1111/1467-9817.00034

- Wilson, S. (2005). Fluency in the classroom from read aloud to independent reading assessment, collaboration, practice, and performance. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 41(1),.
- Witmer, S. E., Cook, E., Schmitt, H., & Clinton, M. (2015). The read-aloud accommodation during instruction: Exploring effects on student self-perceptions and academic growth. *Learning Disabilities -- A Contemporary Journal*, 13(1), 95-109.
- Wood, D., (2006). Modeling the relationship between oral reading fluency and performance on a statewide reading test. *Educational Assessment*, 11(2), 85-104.
- Worthy, J., Maloch, B., Pursley, B., Hungerford-Kresser, H., Hampton, A., Jordan, M., & Semingson, P. (2015). What are the rest of the students doing? Literacy work stations in two first-grade classrooms. *Language Arts*, 92(3), 173-186.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Request For Permission To Use Survey Instrument

**From:** Diane DeFord <[mac2com@gmail.com](mailto:mac2com@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** LinkedIn network and Research Gate  
**Date:** August 29, 2017 at 10:21:11 AM EDT  
**To:** "Jamaul Kennedy, Ed.S." <[invitations@linkedin.com](mailto:invitations@linkedin.com)>

Jamaul,

Sorry to have been hard to reach. I've been particularly busy and away from home from early a.m. until late at night. You might want to look into Research Gate at research [gate.net](http://gate.net), as my own work as well as many who have done similar research are able to follow and download research articles. In the meantime, you do have permission to use the TORP in your research and I'm attaching two files that will be helpful to you.  
DD

## Appendix B: Deford Theoretical Orientation To Reading Profile

### The DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile

*Please read the statements below regarding reading and reading instruction. Select the best answer that reflects your use of such instructional practices.*

*1=never 2=seldom 3=sometimes 4=always*

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A student's increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. The modeling of fluency and expression are components of your reading instruction and lead to success in terms of comprehension for struggling readers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. When struggling readers do not know a word, you instruct them to sound out it's parts immediately.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. You repeat words a number of times after it has been introduced to insure that it will become a part of sight vocabulary for your struggling readers.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. You instruct your struggling readers to pay close attention to punctuation marks to help with the understanding of story content.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. You use the sight word flashcard drill with your struggling readers as a form of practice in during your reading instruction.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Your formal instruction in reading is necessary to insure the adequate development of all skills used in reading.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. You teach struggling readers the importance of the skills you are currently addressing in relation to other skills.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

9. You introduce new words before they appear in the reading text.	1	2	3	4
10. You do a read aloud daily with your struggling readers.	1	2	3	4
11. Your struggling readers read in cooperative groups using texts on their level?	1	2	3	4
12. Your children have sustained silent reading time during instruction.	1	2	3	4
13. Your struggling readers receive the opportunity to choral read with an accomplished reader in the same class during instruction.	1	2	3	4
14. You model fluency and expression with your struggling readers.	1	2	3	4
15. You correct students when they mispronounce grade appropriate words before allowing assistance.	1	2	3	4

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

Introduction: Thank you for contributing your professional expertise and valuable time to this interview. This interview is intended to solicit your knowledge on reading instruction and to elaborate on your decision making regarding instructional practices. It will be an open-ended interview in order for you to give your ideas and thoughts on reading instruction. Feel free to talk about any experiences or ideas that come to mind.

1. Walk me through your typical reading instruction period.
2. Describe any methods for grouping your students. (rationale, frequency, effectiveness.) How often do you ability group your students, if any? Why?
3. Describe the various types of materials you use for reading instruction for struggling readers. Are they effective in addressing the needs of your readers?
4. What kinds of activities do you involve your struggling readers in for the majority of your reading instructional block? Why?
5. What instructional activities have you found to be most successful with your struggling readers?
6. What do you find most challenging during your reading instruction as you work with struggling readers?
7. If you did not have to worry about test scores, how would your reading instruction differ for teaching your struggling readers?
8. What are some strategies you use for to help your struggling readers with skill acquisition and comprehension?

Closure: Thanks very much for your time and willingness to share your ideas. As a result, your identity will be kept confidential.

## Appendix D: Irb Permission

From: CSU IRB <irb@columbusstate.edu>  
Date: Fri, Dec 22, 2017 at 2:12 PM  
Subject: Conditional Exempt Approval Protocol 18-029  
To: Jamaul Kennedy <kennedy\_jamaul@columbusstate.edu >

Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

Date: 10/24/17

Protocol Number: 18-029

Protocol Title: LITERACY CONNECTION: An Examination of Instructional Practices of Fourth Grade Reading Teachers in the Dougherty County School System

Principal Investigator: Jamaul Kennedy

Co-Principal Investigator: Michael Richardson

Dear Jamaul Kennedy:

The Columbus State University Institutional Review Board or representative(s) has reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the project is classified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations and has been approved. Conditional approval is granted pending the approval from the listed outside performance site(s).

Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu or (706) 507-8634.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Amber Dees, IRB Coordinator

Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University



## Appendix E: Informed Consent Form – Survey



COLUMBUS STATE  
UNIVERSITY

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jamaul Kennedy, a graduate student in the Counseling, Foundations, and Leadership department at Columbus State University. Dr. Michael Richardson will be chairing this research project.

#### **I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to examine the instructional practices of teachers for struggling readers. This study seeks to get an overview of the instructional practices that fourth grade teachers are using around the district to assist struggling readers with literacy acquisition. In turn, the hope is that this analysis will help to provide teachers who are new to the district and other teachers who may need guidance in helping to meet the needs of struggling readers.

#### **II. Procedures:**

The participant will complete a 20 minute online survey through Survey Monkey that will measure variables that show teacher's use of specific instructional strategies for struggling readers. All responses from participants will be submitted using Survey Monkey. Participation in this study requires responses to all questions in the survey. Results of the study will be available upon request to all participants. Data may be used for future research projects.

#### **III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:**

There will be no risks to educators for participation in this study. The risks will be minimized by keeping the results indirectly coded, deleting IP addresses, keeping results stored in a secured office where only the researcher has access, and requesting consent before partaking in the survey.

#### **IV. Potential Benefits:**

Benefits of the study include: 1) Clarification of instructional strategies from participants for new teachers or teachers needing guidance to assist struggling readers. 2). Analysis of instructional practices could lead to much more efficient instructional delivery and performance among struggling readers. 3.) Improvement of teacher instruction.

#### **V. Costs and Compensation:**

Participants will receive no incentives for participation in this study.

#### **VI. Confidentiality:**

Data used in this study will be indirectly coded, such that the researcher creates a unique code for identifying participants that has an indirect relationship with the participant. Only the researcher can associate the identification code with the participant. All of the data will be transferred to data software on the researcher's password protected computer.

Revised 10/01/2017

and store for a period that will not exceed five years. All information will be destroyed after the five year period.

**VII. Withdrawal:**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Jamaul Kennedy at 229-291-2156 or [kennedy\\_jamaul@columbusstate.edu](mailto:kennedy_jamaul@columbusstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu).

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By selecting the *I agree* radial and *Submit*, I agree to participate in this research project. Participation is not dependent upon age, but upon the subject and grade being taught. All participants must be teachers who are teaching reading in a fourth grade classroom.

☐ I agree.

☐ I do not agree.

**Submit**

Revised 10/01/2017

## Appendix F: Informed Consent Form – Interviews



You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jamaul Kennedy, a graduate student in the Counseling, Foundations, and Leadership department at Columbus State University. Dr. Michael Richardson will be chairing the research project.

### **I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to examine the instructional practices of teachers for struggling readers. This study seeks to get an overview of the instructional practices that fourth grade teachers are using around the district to assist struggling readers with literacy acquisition. In turn, the hope is that this analysis will help to provide teachers who are new to the district and other teachers who may need guidance in helping to meet the needs of struggling readers.

### **II. Procedures:**

The participant will complete a 30 minute follow-up phone interview with the researcher in hopes to help show the relation among the use of instructional strategies among the participants. The interviews will be done in a private office in the researcher's school. The researcher will be alone in the private office. All responses from participants will be recorded using a recording device. The responses and recording will be kept in a locked office that only the researcher will have access to. Data may be used for future research projects.

### **III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:**

There will be no risks to the educators during this study.

### **IV. Potential Benefits:**

Benefits of the study include: 1) Clarification of instructional strategies from participants for new teachers or teachers needing guidance to assist struggling readers. 2) Analysis of instructional practices could lead to much more efficient instructional delivery and performance among struggling readers. 3) Improvement of teacher instruction.

### **V. Costs and Compensation:**

Participants will not receive incentives for participation in this study.

### **VI. Confidentiality:**

Data used in this study will be indirectly coded. All of the data will be transcribed on the researcher's password protected computer and stored for a period that will not exceed five years. All information will be destroyed after the five year period.

### **VII. Withdrawal:**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

Revised 10/01/2017

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Jamaul Kennedy at 229-291-2156 or [kennedy\\_jamaul@columbusstate.edu](mailto:kennedy_jamaul@columbusstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu).

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project. Participation is not dependent upon age, but upon the subject and grade being taught. All participants must be teachers who are teaching reading in a fourth grade classroom.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

Revised 10/01/2017



## Appendix G: District Request for Research Process

### **Recruitment Letter to Superintendent**

Dear Superintendent Dyer,

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in your district have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your teachers' participation in filling out the survey and participate in a phone interview.

The purpose of this study is to examine variables that have an impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. I am interested in making comparisons between teacher responses from your schools and the other 13 schools in the district. This study will require teachers to complete an online survey that takes twenty minutes and a phone interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. All of the responses will be indirectly coded. Results may be useful in adding to prior research on the topic and better informing educators about the variables that have a significant impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. If you have any questions or concerns regarding survey items or interview questions, please feel free to contact Jamaul R. Kennedy at 229.291.2156. Thank you in advance for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Jamaul R. Kennedy  
Fifth Grade Reading Educator  
Dougherty County School System  
Albany, Georgia 31707

## Appendix H: School Request for Research Process

### **Recruitment Letter to Principals**

Dear Principals,

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in your school have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your teachers' participation in completing surveys and interviews.

The purpose of this study is to examine variables that have an impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. I am interested in making comparisons between teacher responses from your schools and the other 13 schools in the district. This study will require some teachers to complete an online survey that takes twenty minutes and a phone interview that will take 30 minutes. Results may be useful in adding to prior research on the topic and better informing educators about the variables that have a significant impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. If you have any questions or concerns regarding survey items or interview questions, please feel free to contact Jamaul R. Kennedy at 229.291.2156. Thank you in advance for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Jamaul R. Kennedy  
Fifth Grade Reading Educator  
Dougherty County School System  
Albany, Georgia 31707

## Appendix I: Participant Request for Research Processes

### **Recruitment Letter to Teachers**

Dear Teachers,

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in your school have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your participation in filling out the survey. Based on number years of teaching, you may be asked to participate in a follow up interview.

The purpose of this study is to examine variables that have an impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. I am interested in making comparisons between teacher responses from your schools and the other 13 schools in the district. This study will require teachers to complete an online survey that takes twenty minutes. All of the responses will be anonymous. Results may be useful in adding to prior research on the topic and better informing educators about the variables that have a significant impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. If you have any questions or concerns regarding survey items or interview, please feel free to contact Jamaul R. Kennedy at 229.291.2156. Thank you in advance for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Jamaul R. Kennedy  
Fifth Grade Reading Educator  
Dougherty County School System  
Albany, Georgia 31707



Dear Teachers,

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in your school have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your participation in completing a phone interview.

The purpose of this study is to examine variables that have an impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. I am interested in making comparisons between teacher responses from your schools and the other 13 schools in the district. This study will require teachers to complete a phone interview that takes thirty minutes. All of the responses will be anonymous. Results may be useful in adding to prior research on the topic and better informing educators about the variables that have a significant impact on the literacy acquisition of fourth grade struggling readers. If you have any questions or concerns regarding survey interview questions, please feel free to contact Jamaul R. Kennedy at 229.291.2156. Thank you in advance for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Jamaul R. Kennedy  
Fifth Grade Reading Educator  
Dougherty County School System  
Albany, Georgia 31707



## Appendix J: Email Scripts for Participants

Dear Teachers,

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in your school have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your participation in filling out the survey. Based on number years of teaching, you may be asked to participate in a follow up interview.

Greetings!

Thank you for taking the time to complete my survey entitled **"The Deford Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile"** aimed at conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, you have been selected and are being invited to participate in an interview due to your years of experience teaching reading. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your participation in completing a phone interview.

I would love to interview you briefly and gather some important qualitative data to help with my study. I would hope that you agree to help me and if so please provide me with a time to reach out to you and conduct the interview over the phone. I will be conducting interviews Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 3:00pm- 9:00pm. *If we need to come up with an alternative method to conduct the interview, please let me know and I will accommodate you accordingly.*

In your email response, please provide which day and time would be best for you.

## Appendix K: Email Script for Principals

Greetings!

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in our district have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your teachers' participation in filling out the survey and participate in a phone interview. Further explanations are attached to the recruitment letter in this email. **In return, whether granting permission or not, please provide me with your permission in writing on letter head and a scanned signature on the recruitment letter. Thank you so much, as I strive to find ways to bridge the achievement gap among struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System.**

## Appendix L: Email Script for Superintendent

My name is Jamaul R. Kennedy, a graduate student at Columbus State University. I am conducting research for a dissertation towards my doctoral degree. The purpose of my study is to examine the instructional practices of fourth grade teachers in the Dougherty County School System for struggling readers. As such, teachers in our district have been selected and are being invited to participate in this study. I am seeking your permission and support to conduct this study and request your teachers' participation in filling out the survey and participate in a phone interview. Further explanations are attached to the recruitment letter in this email. **In return, whether granting permission or not, please provide me with your permission in writing on letter head and a scanned signature on the recruitment letter. Thank you so much, as I strive to find ways to bridge the achievement gap among struggling readers in the Dougherty County School System.**

## Appendix M: Letter of Cooperation From District



### DOUGHERTY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

P.O. Box 3170/200 Pine Avenue  
Albany, Georgia 31706-3170  
(229) 431-1315 • FAX (229) 431-1810

**KENNETH DYER**  
SUPERINTENDENT

**DR. UFOT INYANG**  
ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT FOR  
ACADEMIC SERVICES

November 14, 2017

Mr. Jamaul R. Kennedy  
500 Pinson Road B2  
Albany, Georgia 31705

Dear Mr. Jamaul R. Kennedy:

The Dougherty County School System is pleased to collaborate with you on your study entitled LITERACY CONNECTION: "An Examination of Instructional Practices of Fourth Grade Reading Teachers in the Dougherty County School System."

As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit elementary reading teachers for this study from our school district. We grant you permission to contact reading teachers to complete the online survey and participate in an interview in a manner that does not disrupt the learning environment, and to disseminate the collective results of the study to the designated personnel from the school district. We have been assured by you that there are no known risks to elementary reading teachers participating in this study in that the survey and interview responses will be indirectly coded. We are further assured that participants can drop out of the study at any time if they so chose; that no identifying information will be kept. Lastly, you have assured that if the study is published, or if the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated.

We look forward to working with you, and please consider this communication as our Letter of Cooperation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ufot Inyang'.

Ufot Inyang, Ed.D  
Associate Superintendent of Academic Services  
Dougherty County School System